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SPIRITUAL EXERCISES
PREPARATORY TO
RELIGIOUS RECEPTION

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SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

PREPARATORY TO

RELIGIOUS RECEPTION,

Compiled from various approved sources.

BY

A Religious of the Presentation Order.

THE
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MEDITATION

FOR THE

EVE OF RECEPTION RETREAT.



FIRST PRELUDE.—Place yourself in the presence of God. Imagine you go to seek Him in solitude, to treat alone with Him on a total change of life—an affair of the greatest importance for your salvation.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg grace to understand *well* the necessity of this retreat.

FIRST POINT.

Consider seriously that you are entering into holy solitude, to treat with God on your entire change and renovation of life, which is of the utmost importance for your salvation.

Reflect on the excellence of this retreat, and on the spiritual exercises you are to perform in it. Saint Basil saith: "Solitude or retreat is the school of celestial doctrine, where God is all our study, and Jesus Christ is the way by which we arrive at the knowledge of God, the Sovereign Truth." Jesus Christ saith: "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh to the Father but by Me." It is in solitude with Jesus Christ that we can acquire the knowledge of God, which will so influence our hearts as to enkindle within us divine love, and will direct our actions to His greater honour and glory. In retreat with Him, we discover the way to eternal life, and learn to fly the conversation of

the world, to treat with God alone, and with our Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom we shall find abundance of peace. "He shall sit solitary and hold his peace; because he hath taken it upon himself."—*Lament.* iii., 28. In solitude the soul rises above itself and all terrestrial things, to contemplate with the eye of faith the eternal truths. In retreat the contemplative, saith Isaias, "stoppeth his ears, lest he hear wickedness, and shutteth his eyes" to all earthly things, "that he may see no evil. He shall dwell on high, the fortifications of rocks shall be his highness: bread is given to him; his waters are sure. His eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall see the land afar off. His heart shall meditate" holy "fear," and shall "ponder the words of the law."—xxxiii. This signifies that in holy solitude and retreat we can leisurely contemplate the excellence and attributes of the Lord, the great King of Hearts, and His divine law, that we may observe it. All the things of the world will then appear to us vile and base, while our affections begin to be enamoured with the attractive beauty of God, and with the loveliness of His holy tabernacle. Then it is that we obey the interior voice of His Holy Spirit, attracting us to Himself. "Be still, and see that I am God;" as if the Lord said: Cease from your ordinary occupations during retreat, quit every other affair but the most important concerns of your soul and your eternal salvation. Attend to the interior voice of my grace, and see that I am your Creator, your Redeemer, your Benefactor, your Judge, your Last End, and, in fine, your All. What employment more excellent could you have, or what more beautiful object could your understanding contemplate? Say, then, with Jeremias: "It is good to wait with silence for the salvation of God"—*Lament.*, iii. Wait on the Lord as your happy portion and inheritance, and expect His visit to your heart by interior inspirations and the breathings of His Holy Spirit during your solitude. Petition our Lord to make you enter into a *perfect* retreat, separating you entirely from all other things, in order to think of Him, and Him alone, and to embrace Him with all the affection of your heart and soul. "My beloved to me, and I to Him who feedeth among the lilies." [*Pause and reflect.*]

SECOND POINT.

Consider more particularly the spiritual advantages that will accrue to your soul from the spiritual exercises you will practise in this retreat. Saint Basil enumerates, among the many advantages of solitude, four in particular, which perfectly suit these exercises, in which you are going to be engaged. Firstly, "it is in retreat the faculties of the soul, obscured and blinded by the dust of earthly things, recover their first vigour." This is truly the design and end of all spiritual exercises during retreat: in effect we then begin to open our eyes, and consider what regards our eternal salvation, so that we understand, quite differently from before, the eternal truths which are proposed to us, and become convinced that till now we were spiritually blind, taking evil for good, and good for evil, despising what we should esteem, and esteeming what we should despise. Secondly, Saint Basil saith: "Solitude is the furnace in which are formed the vessels of the Sovereign King." It is like a crucible in which the soul is consumed, and where she is purified as a precious metal from the dross of her vices and sins, which is the design of the purgative life. Thirdly, "Retreat," continues the Saint, "is a delicious garden, where all the virtues, like beautiful flowers, grow and display their beauty and their scent. Roses appear there tinged with charity; lilies of chastity, of snowy fairness, intermingled with violets of most perfect humility. In this garden of holy retreat we see the myrrh of self-denial and mortification of the body, as well as of the spirit. There we are perfumed with the incense of holy prayer, which perpetually exhales towards heaven a sweet odour, being burned with the fire of divine love." Are not these virtues exercised in holy retreat, the business of the illuminative life, for the soul, entering into this garden of the mysteries of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, gathers there the flowers of all virtues, by carefully imitating His divine example? Saint Basil finally saith: "Solitude is the ladder of Jacob, by means of which there is a happy commerce formed between men and the angels, raising the former to heaven, and causing the angels to descend on earth to relieve them."

Thus man is raised to the summit of perfection, and attains the highest sanctity, which is no other than union with God, the end of the unitive life. Behold the advantage of a course of spiritual exercises, to which God now invites you. Prepare yourself for them with fervour, and excite in your heart a strong desire to derive these precious fruits from them. [*Pause and reflect.*]

THIRD POINT.

Consider that you are strictly obliged to apply all your care to the due performance of this retreat, as the reason for which you undertake it is most important ; since it is no other than your renouncing the world to embrace a religious state, and entering on the newness of a holy religious life, which should be commenced by a good novitiate. The advantages of solitude being so great, as you have just meditated on, you should endeavour to enter into it with suitable dispositions. David instructs us in what condition the place should be, where God will manifest Himself to us. "In a desert land," saith he, "and where there is no way and no water; so in Thy sanctuary I have come before Thee, to see Thy power and Thy glory."—*Psalms* lxii. "In a desert land:" this means my interior, which is like a desert, because I have banished from it all thoughts and remembrance of creatures;" "where there is no way," because I have closed up by acts of mortification, my senses, which are the avenues whereby creatures could enter into my heart; "and no water," because free from those irregular desires and passions, which flowed from the miserable land of my corrupt being; "so in the sanctuary have I come before Thee," by my endeavouring to imitate Jesus Christ, the Holy of Holies, and retiring into the divine sanctuary of His Sacred Heart, to establish there my dwelling, in order to "contemplate His power and His glory." You may observe by this in what dispositions you should be to perform well these spiritual exercises. Your mind must be disengaged from the recollection of creatures; your senses must be restrained as to sight, hearing, and other material gratifications; your interior closed to all exterior objects

which could distract ; your heart freed from the irregular passions of desire, sadness, fear, and aversion, so that nothing interiorly or exteriorly may disturb your retreat. But to attain this you should enter into the hallowed side of our Lord Jesus Christ, even into His Sacred Heart, as into a secure fortress or sanctuary. Let this be your oratory, where you will make your meditations during retreat. You will find within the Sacred Heart of Jesus all that will be necessary for you : there you will discover, by the constant exercise of prayer, flames of divine love to enliven your affections, and strength to confirm you in all your good resolutions. Beg earnestly of your Divine Redeemer to open this door of His Sacred Side and Heart, that He may introduce you into Himself, that you may say with holy David : “ In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest, for Thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope. ’ It has been there that you took your first birth, being made the child of God by baptism : now you are to be born anew by religious reception. Petition Him that you may draw from this divine source the new life of perfection which you wish to embrace, and that you may persevere “ in holiness and justice before God all your days.” Ask this grace of God through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, your good Angel and holy Patron.

FIRST DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the end for which man and all things that serve him were created.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine the Lord our God seated on a throne of infinite majesty, like an immense sea, from whence issue forth the rivers of creatures, all returning to Himself, as to their final end.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Humbly beseech Him for light to know your true and final end.

FIRST POINT.

The end for which man was created is to praise, reverence, and serve his God, and by this means to save his soul. "You have your fruit unto justification, and your end unto life everlasting."—*Rom.*, vi., 22. In the great, bad world outside, the "fruit" is lost very often, and the "end" forfeited or forgotten: but the "world" is God's foe, and, according to its kind, brings forth fruit of woe and end of perdition. Alas! I have had many an illustration of man's utter forgetfulness and God's great love and patience; because I saw that in too many cases, if not in the majority of them, man thought himself made for anything rather than God, and his deeds due to anything rather than God's glory. I have seen deeds and desires regulated by what was called pleasure, directed to what was called distinction or honour, dedicated to what was termed wisdom, learning, or philanthropy; but how exceedingly few have I ever seen that brought forth "fruits" entirely for sanctification, and every one of whose desires, designs, ambitions, and labours tended to life everlasting! Very, very few; and it may be that I myself have joined the general opinion in the practices which distinguished my own career; and that if I have occasionally started at the opposition between my "fruits" and my belief, yet that the majority of my actions have not sprung from the communication of God, nor borne the impression of His seal. Well may I cry, "Through my fault!" at the many days which have been lost, and the many fruits which contribute not to the life eternal which they should nourish. I have been taken out of the world, that whirlpool where the strength of association sweeps around, and the direct progress which conscience sometimes struggles to attain becomes nearly impossible. For His own great love and His own mysterious mercy, He has placed me here. "I will have mercy on whom I will." Everything conceivable belongs to God, were formed by Him for no other purpose than Himself, because the idea of God proposing to Himself an end inferior to Himself, is an idea as repugnant as God forgetting or offending Himself. The Scriptural words, "God created all things for Himself," verify

themselves in the fact that He *is* God, and cannot give His honor to another. It is not simply that He gave all things an existence which they could not have without Him ; that He gave them all life, form, organism, or revealed them from hidden depths ; but God, by a command, gave every one of them an existence, their essence, substance, form, direction, and power, being all His own. From the grandest intelligence among the angels to the humblest worm that crawls, the grain of sideway dust to the greatest planets in the sky, it was all the same ; He gave them from His own hand all they have and all they are, and knew them from eternity as He knows them now, and, like the stars, “ called them by their names,” every one. Can you imagine them mindful of this and ignoring their origin, or can you imagine them unmindful of it, and sound or sane of thought ? And when you remember that not only are they so entirely His, but that at no minute of all their lives or existences can they one moment subsist without His attention—a kind of creation over again each instant—you will comprehend how singular a phenomenon evil can produce by making us forgetful or indifferent to the condition in which we have been placed by Him. He planted the tree, and not only planted it, but set its seed ; and not only set the seed, but even made it ; and not only made it, but made the ground in which it was laid down ; and not only made the ground which grows it, but the dew, sunshine, heat, and sweet air which cherish it and bring it to maturity. And He may no less claim the produce in this case than He can deny being the Master ; and can no more deny being the Master than He can deny Himself. Looking a step further, and considering that God has given to man’s fruits the value “ unto life everlasting,” we are overwhelmed with astonishment. Looking from the earth to the sky, the magnificent world below, where His majesty and beauty are mirrored and His power demonstrated in the humblest blossom that smiles on a hedgerow ; and rising to the world above, the world where the morning stars ever sing the chorus of His grandeur and the boundlessness of His sway, and stretching away to the realms of light undiscovered, where science has never entered, and conjecture stands

dumb at the gate of infinity, we sink on our knees humbled and afraid, crying, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of Him?" But when I think that He has instituted a communion between me and Himself, that he counts my deeds and numbers my sufferings, that He has made Himself the crown of those who act rightly, and as the profoundest judgment of our own happiness would dictate, gives the most ineffable reward for the merit of not making ourselves miserable, we see something more astonishing in His mystery of love than we see in the mystery of His power, and bow prostrate in wondering affection. Shall the passing and fragile creature carry our love away from Him? No matter what its charms, no matter what its promise, no matter what its disguises, shall I not feel the attractions of my God, the boundless beauty of His promise, the ineffable light of His love, and cling to Him faithfully forever?

SECOND POINT.

It is plain, therefore, that God has given all things to man that man may employ them for the two same ends: His worship and service, and the salvation of the soul. In the aggregate, all were given for these ends, and each individually was given for that purpose. Indeed, it could not be otherwise: for as every thought of man, and deed, and desire, belongs to the Infinite, the things about which the thoughts engage themselves must have been bestowed for the purpose of multiplying the communings of man with God, enforcing God's claim, and demonstrating man's obligations. It is a true and beautiful fact that God made man for Himself, and made all other things for man. Thus the infinite wisdom would make all the creation, inanimate and irrational, converge to the call of Eternal Right by the speaking soul that gives life to the material world, when the great high-priest, Man, stands in God's presence representing it. Without man, what is the gorgeous beauty of the earth, or the magnificent grandeur of the heavens? The never-changing order and rich and deep harmonies in which the countless voices of sun and system "praise the Lord," obtain their significance only from the "image and likeness"

of Him who made them ; and as he stands first among the creatures below heaven, he transforms their blind obedience into homage, and their senseless glory into the splendour of rational worship. Thus, the Psalmist could sing : " Fire, hail, snow, ice, the spirit of the storms, praise the Lord."—*Ps.* cxlviii., and could call upon "the mountains and all the hills, the fruit-bearing trees and the cedars, to give Him praise." Nay, thus the unseen is revealed and the unknown is discovered, and all arranged in the beautiful chorus. Because the remotest region of the sky, peopled with galaxies whose light has never reached our sphere, and the abysses, where hide the unnamed ores and gems that even time may not unveil to us, by man's position become God's worshippers ; and the less known, the more the heart which feels its own nothingness rises to the estimate of God's goodness, his own dignity and nothingness, and thus gives even a more devotional tongue of worship to that which is never beheld. Mysterious creature of benediction and glory is man, a "little less than the angels"—nay, in some things even more. Yet all these things, earth, heaven, and sea, fulfil the eternal law, and never refuse the eternal direction. Man only, for whom they have been produced, makes the discord, the agency spoken of by St. Paul : the creature groans in captivity, while man perverts its nature and debases its purpose by his passion. "Serve Him," cries the universe, and man says, No. "We come," say all creatures, "to help you in the worship of our Father God." Man answers, "Nay, rather, you must serve God's enemy or myself ;" and, as far as is within our small power, we try to make God's creatures God's enemies, like the devils and sinful men. May it be God's good will that if we have made God's creatures rise against God, we lament and henceforward be changed : if we have made God's creatures groan in the bondage of our bad dominion, we shall henceforth be changed ; and that the creature which man obtained to be consecrated to God's service shall no longer be debased, and that our will and God's gifts harmonize for ever and ever.

THIRD POINT.

As the creature, which, as you know, is everything outside God, neither has nor can have any end or aim but God—to help us to God—we have a clear view of the creature's mission. As has been remarked, we may stop the creature on its road, or force it by our sovereignty to rebel against God; but this is not now the question which concerns our reflections. We speak of what should be, not of what we make to be in spite of right and law. If we act fairly, honestly, then, by the creatures of God, we have only one way of employing them. The things which we employ must be for God alone; the number of them, the quantity of them, the species of them. Any deviation from the rule, by employing some for Him and some against His sovereignty, some in part for right and some in part for evil—anything other than completeness, as far as we employ them, and exclusion of anything else than God in the use they are put to—is a species of desecration which we shall know only when we see it judged. To use creatures, abstain from the use of them, use them in this or that form, all, and in every case as far as such use helps us nearer to God our Father, is the only sinless appropriation, and the only one approved of God. “Whatever you do in word or in work, all do in the name of the Lord Jesus.” If, then, any creature has been valued for its own sake, and without reference to God; if any person has engaged our minds who brought us not direct to God; if any employment has attracted our preference, irrespective of its power of bringing us to God; if any thought has pre-occupied the soul, and at the same time had no word of praise or point of union for God; if any pleasure or pain had been judged or estimated independently of the relations in which it placed us with God, we have reason to pause and examine whether we cannot make great changes, and whether we need not great improvement in the use we make of creatures in reference to our last end. May Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, become the spring of all our thought and action, and the object of all our desires. “He who is not for Me is against Me; he who gathereth not with Me, scattereth.”

Nor should we forget that all the grand congregation of wonders in the heavens and on the earth has been really made for each of us. To each, as well as to all, "the heavens tell the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims itself the work of His hands."—*Ps.* xviii. For each human being, all does the work of linking in light the soul of man and his Almighty Father, while each may, without exaggeration, say that in the order of approximation he is as near the great God as all creation joined together. How far above the littleness of self, how far above the meanness of paltry passion, such a grand creature ought to feel! The glories of the universe are his handmaidens, and he stoops to the husks of the swine and the companionship of the hog! Oh! the grand pride that, with the wing of conscious dignity, rises and flies high above the atmosphere of earth, and grows great in the power of its privileges, ought guard the door of human nature from the entrance of sin and sorrow, and fill it with the sentiment that humanity is too exalted to stoop to the mire of fallen nature's passions. If we have felt less grateful than we should for an end so grand and hopes so transcendent, let us say: "Give me intelligence and I will search Thy law, bring me into the way of Thy commandments, because I have desired it."—*Ps.*, cxviii., 34. "Now, I have said, I have begun." May the light of the Lord so shine upon our souls that we may be attracted only by such creatures as can help us, and that we may employ them with the one design of assisting us to our last end. But God Himself reveals within our own hearts and demonstrates to our own experience, ever and always, that He alone is the end for which man is made. No other can satisfy man, and everything else deceives him. In all the history of mankind you will find the virtues regarded as the real happiness, or the real road to happiness, even such as the world can produce. Charity, benevolence, fidelity, honesty, integrity, temperance, chastity, the classes of thought and form of feeling which come direct from on high, have been recognized as the bond of sound social being, and the honour and felicity of man, in every clime and every age, even before Jesus Christ gave them distinctness, authority, or title to celestial birth. Nor could this have been, unless the Author of nature had implanted them

as He implanted the oak in the acorn, or the energy of never-ending movement in the earth. The soul of the world, by an universal testimony, proclaims those as the things towards which wisdom turns forever ; and, therefore, the soul of the world proclaims that wisdom turns forever towards God, for charity, benevolence, the virtues, mean only Him. “ For Thee was the heart formed, and it never can have peace unless in Thee,” says St. Augustine. “ The day proclaims the word to the day, and night to the night imparts this knowledge,” because the tireless journeying of the globe, its day and its night, are the revelations of God’s presence, and His right to the creatures that dwell upon its surface. And we are, maybe, also testimonies to ourselves. For when have we taken anything for our solace, and not been deceived—unless we hold by God? The more we have tried, the more we have realized the utter worthlessness of all things merely human. “ Vanity of vanity, and all is vanity,” said the wisest and most experienced of the children of men. Let us pray that all things within and without us, every will, wish, and aspiration ; every employment, movement, and sentiment ; every notion of pain, pleasure, joy, or bliss, shall henceforward get their names from God, and their value from their power of uniting us more and more to His Fatherly Heart. Amen.

FIRST DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On Mortal Sin.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you see Jesus Christ our Lord, seated upon His tribunal about to give judgment, with a severe countenance. A river of fire to burn sinners issues from His Throne ; and I will imagine myself before Him like a wicked offender, bound with the fetters of innumerable sins, fearing and trembling like one that deserves to be condemned and burnt with that terrible fire.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg light to see and grace to sorrow for your many sins.

FIRST POINT.

The first point is to call to mind the sin of the angels who were created by God in the empyreal heaven, replenished with wisdom and grace ; but, abusing their free will, they grew proud and rebelled against their Creator, for which they were thrown out of heaven and cast into hell, losing forever the end and blessedness for which they were created. In this truth of the Catholic faith there are comprised three things :—First, I will consider how liberal Almighty God was to the angels, creating them according to His own image and likeness, and communicating to them, without any merit of theirs, most excellent gifts of nature and grace. By reason of which we may say of all, as was said of one, that they were adorned with nine stones very precious—that is, with nine excellencies which Lucifer and the rest received in their creation. For Almighty God made them :—First, pure spirits, without admixture of body ; second, immortal without fear of corruption ; third, intellectual, with great delicacy of wit ; fourth, free, that nothing could force their will ; fifth, wise, with fulness of all natural sciences ; sixth, powerful, above all inferior creatures ; seventh, holy, with the gifts of grace, charity, and the rest of the virtues ; eighth, inhabitants of the paradise of delights, which is the empyreal heaven ; ninth, and finally, capable of seeing Almighty God clearly, with promise of this glory if they persevered in His service. Behold these gifts, then, in Lucifer, “ full of wisdom, perfect in beauty, placed in the delights of Paradise, clothed in the glory of every precious stone.”

Secondly, I will consider how ungrateful some of them were against Almighty God, growing arrogant with these gifts, and arming themselves with them against Him from whom they had received them, not giving Him that reverence and obedience which they ought with humility to have given Him, but employing their liberty and powers to offend Him, whom, on so many accounts, they ought to have served.

Thirdly, I will consider how terrible Almighty God showed Himself in chastising them instantly, without

giving them respite or time of repentance, depriving them for that *one* sin, of those gifts of grace which He had given them, and throwing them, like lightning from heaven, into the everlasting flames and fire of hell, without regard either to the beauty of their nature or to the greatness of their state, or that they were His creatures made according to His image and likeness, or that they were exceeding wise, or that they had been once His friends ; for *one* mortal sin is *alone* sufficient to obscure all this, and is deserving of so terrible a punishment which (as St. Peter says) God's justice permitted, and ordained for our example. "For if He spared not the angels that sinned, but delivered them drawn down by infernal ropes to the lower hell unto torments ;" although they were so noble, how much less will He omit to punish men obstinate in their transgressions, being as they are so vile and base. Where is the priest like them ? Where is the nun so near God, redolent with the graces of God, flushing in the reflection of the beauty of God ; yet, like lightning, they fell into hell, stricken by the Hand of Justice, and for *one* mortal sin. And if they "who are greater than men in strength and power, bear not the execrable judgment against them," but with great raging and impatience, how much less shall feeble and wretched men be able to endure it ? Oh, how "fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God"—hands so heavy that the angels themselves cannot bear them !

These things I am to apply to myself, pondering how liberal Almighty God has been towards *me*, doing me innumerable benefits, and how ungrateful I have been to Him, committing innumerable sins against Him ; and how I have deserved that God should punish me as He did the angels, and even much more, for their sin was but *one*, mine *many* ; theirs was but a sin of thought only in matter of pride ; mine both of thought, word, and deed, in matter of pride, of luxury, of anger, and of other vices ; theirs was not injurious to the blood of Jesus Christ, for it was not shed for them ; mine are injurious against this most precious blood of the Son of God, which was shed for me upon the Cross. Then, this being so, how just a thing were it that God should have sunk me into hell in the company of the devils,

making me partaker of their pains, seeing I would needs be so of their sins. [*Pause and consider.*]

SECOND POINT.

Call to memory the sin of *our first parents*, Adam and Eve, who, having been created in Paradise, and in original justice, broke the commandment of God, eating the fruit of the tree which, upon pain of death, He had forbidden them, for which they were cast forth from Paradise, and incurred the sentence of death and other innumerable miseries, as well for themselves as for all their offspring. Hence I will consider how liberal Almighty God was to our first parents, creating them of His mere goodness according to His own image and likeness, and placing them in a paradise of delights, giving them His grace and original justice, subjecting their appetites to reason and the flesh to the spirit, freeing them from mortality and penalties to which by nature they were subject, and granting them a happy and most contented state. And all this He did of His pure grace and mercy, granting it to them not only for themselves, but also for their successors if they had persevered in His service.

Secondly, I must consider how ungrateful they were to Almighty God, and what motive they had for that; for the serpent coming to tempt Eve, and promising her that if they ate of the forbidden fruit they should not die, but should rather be as God Himself, having knowledge of good and evil, she suffered herself to be beguiled, ate of the fruit, and invited Adam to do so, who, to please her, ate also of it, treading under foot the pleasure of God for the pleasure of his wife, without making account either of the benefits that God had done him, or of the punishment that He had threatened him with.

Then I will consider how terrible Almighty God showed Himself in chastising them, casting them out of paradise, depriving them forever of original justice, subjecting them to death and to all the miseries of a corruptible body, which miseries we his children incur, because we have all sinned in him, and for this cause we are born the children

of wrath, enemies of God, and condemned to the self-same death. And that which more affrights is, that from this original sin that we inherit of him proceed, as from their root, those innumerable sins that are in the world, and the inundations of miseries that overflow it, by which I may perceive how terrible, dreadful, and hideous an evil mortal sin is, seeing *one* alone deprives of so much good, brings so much evil, and so highly provokes the wrath of God, though He be much more inclined to mercy than to the rigour of justice. Besides this, I must make comparison of my sins with that of Adam; for I, being tempted by the devil, suffered myself to be deluded by him, not once, but often. My flesh has been like to seduced Eve, that has provoked me to sin, and my spirit, effeminated like Adam, to please it, has a thousand times displeased God by breaking His commandments; my pride and ingratitude have arrived to that height that I have often desired to be as God, usurping to myself that which is proper to His Deity. Then, if God inflicted such punishment on my first parents for one sin of disobedience and pride, consisting of nothing more heinous than eating one apple contrary to the precept of Almighty God, how great punishments have I deserved for so many acts of disobedience and pride, and for such innumerable offences as I have committed against Him? Oh, how just had it been that, at my first sin, death should have swallowed me, or all the miseries of the world been showered down upon me! Lastly, I will consider what a long penance Adam and Eve did for this sin of theirs, how bitter that morsel was to them, and how dear it cost them; for Adam, having lived more than nine hundred years, spent them all in weeping and mourning, and suffering a thousand inconveniences which the state of his corruption attracted to it; but in the end, through penance, he obtained pardon. And with this example I must animate myself to lament my miseries and to do penance for my sins, that Almighty God may deliver me from them, imitating in penance him whom I imitated in sin, and beseeching our Lord to chastise me as much as He will in this life, so that He pardon me and deliver me from the torments of the other life.

THIRD POINT.

Call to mind some mortal sin, as perjury or such other like, for which many souls are burning in hell, and that very justly, for injury done to the infinite majesty of Almighty God. I must then descend in spirit into hell, which is full of souls, among which I shall find many that are there burning for one only sin; some for one sin of perjury, others for a bad thought consented to, and others for some other sin of word or of deed. And then I will consider how all these condemned persons were men as well as I, and many of them Christians as well as I, who enjoyed the same sacraments and sacrifices, and those sermons and sacred books, that I enjoy, and were perhaps some time very holy and highly in favour with Almighty God; but by little and little they grew careless, and came to fall into that mortal sin, and by the just judgment of God death attacked them in it, and they were most justly condemned for the same. For, according to St. James, "whosoever shall offend in one point," breaking a commandment, "becomes guilty of all," the same as he who breaks many; for he offends the God of infinite majesty, who commands them all to be observed. Then must I make comparison of this sin with many of mine, pondering with how much more reason I have deserved to be in hell, as those souls are, for having offended Almighty God not once, but often, in other kinds of sins than theirs, and that without number. I may also consider that it is no less a mercy of Almighty God to have preserved me from hell, withholding me from descending to everlasting torments, than if, after I had descended, He had delivered me from them; for which I may say with David, "I will praise Thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Thy name forever," for Thy mercy has been very great towards me, delivering my soul from the depth of hell. [*Pause and reflect; form resolutions.*]

FIRST DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On Venial Sin.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you see St. John the Evangelist writing to his Church in Laodicea, “Be zealous, therefore, and do penance.”

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg grace to detest and sorrow for all your sins, no matter how trivial.

FIRST POINT.

We generally make no account of venial sin ; but if I well conceived the nature of it I would judge otherwise, and take more care to avoid it. How venial soever I may suppose it, it is an offence against God. That is, or ought to be, sufficient for me. In falling into it I displease and offend God. Not that I absolutely break with God, but I do what I know will cause a coldness between God and me ; I do not extinguish the Holy Ghost in myself, but I sadden Him. Now, what is an offence to God ought more to be dreaded by me than all temporal evils, which only regard myself ; for the least evil committed against God infinitely surpasses all the evil that may befall a creature. How venial soever I may suppose it, there is no reason imaginable for which it ever can be permitted ; for if it could be permitted or allowed, it would cease to be a sin. Though there should be question of converting or saving the whole world, God would not be pleased that I should tell even a trivial lie : even in that case He would be offended. Though there should be question of procuring to God, by this means, all the glory that can be given unto Him, He would not accept it on such a condition : He chooses rather that I should even abandon the care of His glory than commit the smallest sin. Howsoever venial I may suppose it to be, it is an article of faith that it will never enter with me, nor I with it, into the kingdom of heaven ; for

“nothing defiled shall be received, nor have place in that celestial kingdom.” In vain would I be otherwise loaded with merits, with all my merits, and with all that sanctity which I might have acquired if my soul, on leaving this life, bear yet the stain of *one* venial sin uneffaced by penance : *that alone* would necessarily be an obstacle to my beatitude, and to the possession of God. My soul, though just, though holy, though predestinated, and worthy of God, must, notwithstanding, remain separated from God until that sin be expiated : it must pass through the fire of purgatory, and be purified therein, before it be admitted into the bosom of God. And with what severity has God, even in this world, punished venial sin ! He almost destroyed a whole people for a simple act of vanity on the part of David : He struck dead, at the foot of the ark, a Levite for having only touched it. It is strange, then, that with such facility I commit a sin which exposes me to such rigorous chastisements ; but what is yet a thousand times more culpable, and more unworthy, is, that being indebted to God for all, and having received all from God, instead of the acknowledgment and love which I owe Him, I suffer myself to be so easily led into sin, by which He is offended and injured. [*Pause and reflect.*]

SECOND POINT.

O that these venial faults which I commit were not so frequent, nor so numerous ! But their multitude is infinite ; and this is what afflicted David. and threw him into extreme desolation, when he said to God, “ I am, O Lord, environed with evils, and my iniquities oppress me : they are without number : they are multiplied above the hairs of my head, and the sight I have of them makes my heart fail me.” Thus spoke that holy king. Now, in a slothful and imperfect life, like mine, should I undertake to sum up all the sins which escape me, and should God vouchsafe to enlighten me therein, to what would that multiplication amount ! I do not see them ; but is it not enough that God sees them ? Is it not enough to know that they are without number, to be penetrated with grief, and become in

a manner inconsolable? How many sins of ignorance, caused through forgetfulness of my duties, through a neglect of being instructed in them, through my indocility in not bearing to be told of them, through my presumption in believing none but myself! How many sins of imprudence and inadvertence, occasioned by the dissipation of my mind, by the levity of my humours, by the liberty of my tongue, by the rashness of my judgments, and the malignity of my suspicions! How many sins of frailty and weakness, caused by a habit of not restraining myself in anything, of subjecting myself to no rule, of following always the motions of nature, and never doing violence to my inclinations or to my temper! How many sins committed even through malice, with reflection and a settled design, against all the remorses of my conscience, on all occasions, and on the slightest account, under the pretence of their being no more than venial sins, and that God will not punish them eternally! Herein I plainly show my indifference for God, and that I am only sensible to my own interests. Is not this my usual manner of life? It is true that it is not morally possible, in this world, to preserve ourselves from all venial sins, so as never to commit any mere indeliberate faults. Fatal necessity! which made the saints to sigh, which made them desire death, which made St. Paul say, "Unhappy man that I am! who will deliver me from this body," the weight of which oppresses me? But there is not one of these sins in particular which I might not prevent, and from which I might not defend myself. How many, then, of their number might I have lessened with care! But, alas! far from diminishing them, I increase them every day. [*Pause and reflect.*]

THIRD POINT.

What are the consequences of venial sin? More deplorable than I have ever persuaded myself. It leads to mortal sin, as sickness leads to death; consequently, if I have any zeal for my soul, I ought to do in regard of venial sin what I would do in regard of a disease with which I am threatened, or with which I am suddenly seized. What

exertions do I not make to stop it in the beginning? What efforts do I not use to cure it? What do I leave undone that may prevent my relapsing? It may end in death, and that is sufficient to make me apply the most efficacious remedies. Why do I not reason thus with myself when tempted to sin, which of all diseases is the most dangerous to the soul, and which disposes me to that second death a thousand times more to be feared than the death of the body? And, in reality, whosoever neglects venial sin, and much more whosoever despises it, will infallibly fall into mortal sin. It is an oracle of the Holy Ghost which is but too often verified by experience. It is by making small account of venial sin that we insensibly lose the horror we have of mortal sin. In the beginning the name alone of mortal sin affrights us, but we accustom ourselves gradually to it, and it becomes familiar to us. So much the more so, because it often happens that there is but small distance between venial to mortal sin, and that the interval between the one and the other is, as it were, imperceptible; for it commonly depends only on a degree of more or less. Now, between this more and this less there is but one point, which decides life and death. What risk do I not then run, and am I not on the brink of a precipice? From this proximity between venial and mortal sin, it very naturally happens that the one is confounded with the other. How often have I deceived myself herein, and how often have I deemed a matter light that was not so! Judging blindly of things according to the desires of my heart, how often have I taken for a venial injustice that which, perhaps, was a mortal sin and a grievous iniquity in the sight of God! To discern the difference was difficult, for which reason I ought to have had a timorous conscience, even with regard to venial sin: I was not enlightened enough to form an exact judgment, and therefore I ought to diffide in myself, and use every prudent precaution. But though I were assured of my own lights, and of my discernment of the one from the other, can I be ignorant that I am weak, and even weakness itself? Now, venial and mortal sin being so nearly connected, what presumption must it not be to flatter myself that, being weak to the degree I know myself

to be, I shall adhere so precisely to venial sin as never to exceed it, and that I shall be so far master of my heart as to keep it within the bounds I will prescribe, especially in certain sins where the impression of nature is so strong and so powerful. To support me under similar circumstances, special and particular graces from God would be necessary ; but have I not been taught a hundred times that one of God's most ordinary chastisements is to refuse us, in consequence of venial sin, the special graces which He has prepared for us, and with which we might happily arrive at the term of salvation : whereas, by the withdrawal of these graces, we fall into errors and disorders, for which He reproves us. It is thus that venial sin may be, and is, for many souls the source of their damnation. [*Pause and reflect ; form resolutions.*]

FIRST DAY.

FIRST LECTURE.

On Gratitude.

Gratitude is a virtue on which even the world prides itself, for it ranks among those exalted feelings which characterize the noble mind. Ingratitude is universally abhorred ; to lie under the imputation of it is disgraceful. Those who are themselves deficient in gratitude exact it from their fellow-creatures, and an individual who has incurred the odium of forgetting services received, bitterly complains when his own are disregarded. When it happens that the favour bestowed is of such a nature as to confer permanent happiness on its object, the most animated expressions assist the grateful emotions of the person obliged, and rapturous thanks proclaim his deep sense of the obligation incurred towards his benefactor. Such are the sentiments which men emulate, such is the disposition cultivated by the noble-minded among creatures. And shall God, your most liberal Benefactor, find you insensible to the lavish testimonies of His love ? Shall the children of the

world act more generously than the children of light? On opening the sacred writings we find the virtue of gratitude consecrated by the most illustrious examples. Noah, on quitting the ark wherein he was preserved from the waters of the deluge, constructed an altar to return thanks to God for this benefit. Abraham, after having received from God the promise of the land of Chanaan, and of the most abundant benedictions, erected a monument as an eternal memorial of his gratitude. Jacob, on awakening from the mysterious sleep, during which the same promises were renewed to him, consecrated the stone on which he had reposed, and offered thereon a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Moses ordered that a portion of the manna should be preserved, to transmit to posterity the knowledge of his Maker's paternal solicitude for His people. In fine, the greater part of the Jewish festivals were instituted to set before the eyes of that nation, and perpetuate, the memory of the favours with which it had been loaded. So true it is that God loves to see His creatures mindful of His gifts. The love of a benefactor can only be repaid by love, and the importance of a benefit is the measure of the gratitude due for it. Revolve in mind all that the God of mercy has done for you, and in the heavenly attraction which has led you to the foot of His tabernacle recognize, with ardent love, the effect of your marked and special graces—a grace of predilection, a grace of separation, a grace of sanctification, a grace of predestination. Ponder deeply these evidences of God's love for you, and while the consideration of them occupies and interests your mind, let it inflame your heart, and transport your soul with gratitude. In your vocation to a religious life, you have been favoured with a grace of predilection. God loved you, and, as the result of His gratuitous love, He selected you from the crowd to place you in the shade of the sanctuary. The Lord declared His love for His chosen people by one of His prophets, assuring them that the ardour of His predilection for them was but weakly prefigured in the avidity with which a thirsty traveller seizes the delicious refreshing fruits which greet his vision on his weary journey; and He compares His feeling, in His merciful election of the cherished nation which was to be

the special depository of His favours, and the peculiar object of His gratuitous love, to the delighted transports of a gardener on culling the first blossoms of a favourite plant, over whose growth he had long and fondly watched. In these affecting images you may recognize an emblem of the grace of your election. Each separate assistance of the divine goodness may well claim a separate act of the most ardent love. God desired your salvation; in order to attain this end, it was necessary to separate you from the idolator and the unbeliever. God did this for you. It was, moreover, requisite that you should be regenerated in the waters of baptism, and marked with the seal of adoption; the Almighty impressed on your soul this glorious character. Useful lessons were needed to teach you to regulate your inclinations, and overcome your faults of character. These lessons were provided by your Heavenly Father, in the progress of a Christian education, and in the edifying examples which Providence set before your eyes. In order to perfect the work of your vocation, it was necessary to attract your heart, to solicit—nay, almost to extort—its submission to the voice of inspiration; and all this has God done for you, in directing your steps to this blessed abode. In the grace of your vocation is included a grace of separation from the world. What is the world? According to the beloved disciple, it is a scene of iniquity: “the whole world,” he says, “is seated in wickedness.” To what danger is not the treasure of grace there exposed? Dangers on *all* sides, dangers of every description—dangers in the objects which engage, in the connexions which captivate, in the discourses which pervert; dangers in the maxims which seduce, in the occasions which deter, in the examples which mislead; dangers in the luxury which enervates, in the pleasures which corrupt. What an abode is that which presents peril at every step; which presents the perpetually recurring necessity of severe struggle and painful resistance, attended often by doubtful victory over the frailty of the heart! What do you not owe to the grace of your vocation? In rescuing you from a corrupt world, from what temptations, what dangers, has it not saved you! You have received with your vocation a *grace of sanctification*. In a

religious life all is sanctifying : its solitude, its exercises, its spirit of holy emulation, the very habit with which you will so soon be clothed—all inculcate sanctity. In the solitude of religion, the voice of God, elsewhere inaudible, can speak effectually to the heart ; the soul, disengaged from the senses, listens to Him in silence, feels His sovereign perfections, feeds on His truth, and, in the words of St. Jerome, beholds His glory—that glory which the apostles themselves were only permitted to gaze on at a distance from the crowd. Happy dwelling ! where, hidden from the world, the solitary hears the consoling voice which speaks to her, and interiorly whispers to her soul, “ Contemplate in holy repose the object of thy love ; ” thou hast sought Him far from the multitude, and now, feeling the sweet calm which His presence produces, acknowledge the wisdom of the steps which has led thee to seek Him here ; under the pure and serene sky of religion, thy days glide on in innocence and peace. Happy mortal ! enjoy thy God, and enjoy thyself. The exercises of a religious life consist, at one time, of the sacrifice of praise, the incense of a pure heart, and the holy harmony of the canticles of Sion, which mount even to the throne of the Lamb ; at another, of fervent prayer, wherein the soul, enlightened on her weakness, deploras the obstacles which arrest her flight, rises on the wings of love, aspires to the perfection of virtue, of which she beholds the model in the God whom she adores. To the preceding exercises add those of profound silence, in which God communicates Himself to the soul, honouring with His most intimate familiarity the heart which listens to His voice ; serious consideration, whereby the religious learns to know her duties, examines into her faults, and grieves for her slightest transgressions ; particular retreats, in which, during an entire separation from creatures, the spirit is renewed, the heart fortified by the aid of resolutions against its natural frailty and inconstancy. Your companions in religion consist of generous souls who have given themselves to God without reserve, and who are only occupied with the desire of pleasing Him. Your holy habit recalls your obligation of aspiring to sanctity. Its simplicity, sometimes even its poverty, offers the most striking

contrast to the pride and pomp of the world, thereby preaching abnegation and humility. The veil which you wear is an image of that life *hidden* in God with Jesus Christ, wherein your only occupation should be to adorn your soul with the interior ornaments of grace. In the grace of your vocation is also included a *grace of predestination*. "Those whom God has predestined," says St. Paul, "them He has called ; those whom He has called, He has justified ; those whom He has justified, He has glorified." The Lord could not give you a more sensible and affecting proof of His love than in this grace, by which He has separated you from the world ; thereby renewing in your regard the prodigy by which He delivered His chosen people from the slavery of Egypt, between which event and a religious vocation there is much similarity. The remembrance of the day on which the nation cherished by heaven was rescued from oppression cannot fail forcibly to recall the happy moment in which you were freed from the servitude of the world. The luminous cloud which preceded the Israelites, and directed their march, is emblematic of the interior grace which enlightened you on the vanity of creatures and the corruption of the world, by pointing out to your view the path which leads to the sanctuary ; the waves which arrested their progress to facilitate the escape of the privileged people, and again resumed their course to insure the destruction of the Egyptians, are a lively emblem of that Providence which so carefully watched over your interests, and furnished you with arms whereby you triumphed over the obstacles which the world and the flesh opposed to your following the call of God. The miraculous water which issued so abundantly from the rock, at the command of the Jewish legislator, is an image of the celestial gifts with which you are favoured in this holy asylum. In fine, the manna which daily fell in the desert is a figure of the Bread of Angels in which you so often participate. "Those whom God has called, He has justified." Removed from the world and its dangers, you have fewer obstacles to conquer, and you possess greater resources to insure your victory. The same God who chose you in His love is still occupied in consummating His own work ;

the graces eternally destined for the perfection of that work are continually and plentifully lavished on you. The Almighty grants to the rest of men the means of sanctification comprised in the general plan of His providence ; but in holy religion you are provided with particular succour and special graces. “Those whom God has justified, He has glorified.” It is true that *constant fidelity* on your part, animated and supported by gratitude, must concur with the grace of God, to ensure your happiness and perseverance. But can a generous heart feel any difficulty in cherishing the feelings inspired by gratitude ; in giving actual proof of that gratitude after the many benefits received ; in persevering in these sentiments of gratitude, while animated by the view of the eternal rewards destined to it, and cheered by the inspiring motive of pleasing a God who allows us to call Him *friend*. These are considerations which sometimes affect even to tears the fervent soul who understands her advantages and knows how to value them. In holy religion everything induces her to praise, to love, and to adore her God. Her home fixed in a secure haven, she beholds from a distance the tempest gathering, a crowd of unhappy beings struggling with the waves, the stormy sea filled with quicksands, and strewed with the wrecks of many vessels. At this sight her happiness redoubles ; she blesses the hand which has preserved her. How merciful ! she exclaims ; how good is the God whom I adore ! He has not given to all such a proof of His predilection. I owe all that I am to His tender goodness, and the love of preference He has shown in my regard transports and inflames my heart. “He hath not done so to every nation.” May these reflections inspire you with the most lively gratitude towards your Divine Benefactor, and convince you more and more of the truth of these words of our Saviour, “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.”

The second lecture can be read out of either the Manual of Novices, the Life of the Foundress of the Institute, or the life of the saint whose name the Novice-Elect is to bear, according to the discretion of the Mistress of Novices.

SECOND DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On Death.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine yourself lying on your bed of death.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg of God the grace so to spend every hour and moment that you may have nothing to regret at that awful hour.

FIRST POINT.

There is nothing more certain than death nor anything more inevitable. It is a punishment to which the justice of God has condemned all men, and it is a general law, wherein I am comprised like the rest. I must die! A terrible sentence; but, after all, what is still more terrible in death is not precisely death itself, but its consequences. Death in itself is an entire separation from all the things of the world—from riches, from honours, from pleasures, from employments, from charges, from parents, from friends, from affairs, from negotiations, from entertainments, and from all that constitutes the temporal life of man. With regard to human society, it is a kind of annihilation. A dead person has no longer a share in anything upon earth; he is no longer seen, no more heard, and, in a short time, he is no more thought of. All this is frightful when considered according to the senses; it is repugnant to nature, for which reason it resists death with all its force. Yet all this, considered in itself, and independent of the consequences of death, is not so frightful as nature and the senses represent it. With whatsoever pain this separation is preceded or accompanied, it is terminated in a very short space of time, and from one moment to another all the pains and sufferings it may have caused to a dying person vanish away without his feeling afterwards the smallest impression. But what is most formidable in the consequences of death

is that they are eternal, so that the moment that shall put an end to my present life will be at the same time for me the beginning of an eternity, either happy or miserable. "On whatsoever side the tree shall fall, there it will remain ;" and the instant it may be said of me, with truth, *she is dead*, it may be added, with the same certainty, *her fate is decided before God*—she is forever either of the number of the elect or of the reprobate : for men die but once, and after death there are no more graces or good works ; consequently, the state wherein they are then found is invariable, and, if it be a state of damnation, it is irreparable. What should still redouble my terror is that I do not know when this dreadful decision of my destiny shall take place, either for eternal bliss or eternal misery, because I do not know when I am to die. Nothing is more evident or more known than the necessity of dying, but nothing more unknown or more hidden than the hour of death. There is not a day which may not be my last ; there is not, then, a day in which I may not receive my sentence, and be either saved forever or lost without resource. These are solid thoughts, which ought continually to occupy me, and which I cannot imprint too strongly on my mind. They are as proper for religious as for worldly persons. Religious and seculars, we are all to die and are equally interested in securing for ourselves a happy death. Now what have I done hitherto to dispose myself thereto, and what am I doing at this present time ? Am I actually in a state fit to die, and would I be willing to die in my present state ? I need but fairly consult my conscience on this head. What does it dictate to me ? What does it reproach me with ? What would it have me to put in order and to rectify before death ? It is this I ought examine and apply myself to, and against this I ought incessantly to take all the necessary precautions. To know the infinite importance of dying well ; to know that each moment may be my last ; not to find myself in the actual dispositions I would willingly have at the hour of my death, is not this sufficient to make me undertake all without the least delay ? [*Pause and reflect.*]

SECOND POINT.

The death of sinners, according to the menace and the expression of the Holy Ghost, is not only wretched but most wretched—most wretched, because of the despair of divine mercy into which they fall ; most wretched, by reason of the trouble which agitates them ; most wretched, by reason of the surprises of death and the sudden strokes which carry them off ; most wretched, and sovereignly wretched, because of the impenitence wherein they die. Has not the death of a religious person, after a negligent and imperfect life, in some proportion, all these characters ? It is very strange and very deplorable that such a comparison may be made, but if I examine the affair to the bottom, and call to mind what I have known, what I have heard, and what, perhaps, I have sometimes seen, I shall find that this comparison is not overstrained. What a subject of trouble it is to a religious person at the hour of death to have done almost nothing of what regarded her rule and was her duty ! to have lived in the house of God and not to be further advanced in the ways through which God would conduct her ! to have quitted the world and to be, notwithstanding, at the end of her days, as void of the spirit of God, as full of the ideas and spirit of the world, as if she had passed all her life in the world ! She will then be, as it were, “invested and besieged with the dolors of death,” for the dolors of death come from the attachment we have to life, to the world, to ourselves. Behold here her condition : she loves life, she loves the world, and she loves herself still more. What must it cost her to break all those ties, and what severe combats she has to endure ! “O death ! is it thus that thou dost separate us ?” Will the soul of such a religious person have recourse to God ? But it is the sight of God that increases its inquietudes and renders it quite desolate. It knows with what remissness it has served Him : a thousand sins, which it treated as scruples, in a life of tepidity and dissipation ; a thousand doubts, which it would not clear up, or which it decided according to its own inclinations, come into its mind. If all those things do not present themselves in detail or in particular, they do in general, and in a con-

fused manner; so much the more terrifying, as it is less able to disentangle itself from the perplexity wherein it is involved. It now suspects all its past actions: its confessions, its communions; the sentiments of its heart which it has followed, the connexions it has kept; the false principles it has entertained on capital and essential points; the liberties it gave itself, in contempt of the rule, and often to the scandal of the community; the dispensations it has sought for, and the ways it has made use of to obtain them. Heretofore nothing of all this gave it any pain; but that conscience, then so large, is now become narrow, or rather a right conscience, which serves only to torment it the more. Efforts are made to inspire it with confidence in God and in His mercy; but, notwithstanding all that can be said to it, there remains still an obscurity in the soul, an uncertainty, a remembrance of its obligations, and a reproach of its perpetual transgressions—a fear of God's judgments capable of throwing it into consternation. If it does not go so far as to despair, the ray of hope it retains is so weak that it has scarce strength to raise and support it. It is still more to be lamented when it is struck with a sudden death, for persons are as much exposed in religion as in the world to unforeseen and sudden deaths; and as God has secret chastisements, which He exercises in the world, He likewise has those which He exercises in religion. A whole house that witnesses such an accident is affected by it. They judge charitably of the person, they pray and hope for her; but, at the same time, they cannot but reflect, without dissimulation, that the life which she had led was far from being regular and edifying. They are obliged to admit, and cannot hinder themselves from saying—at least, from thinking—that it were to be wished that she had had time to enter into and prepare herself. Time, alas! Has she not had it? And what else ought to be the whole life of a religious person but an habitual preparation for death? It is not time, then, that she wanted; but the will to improve or turn it to her advantage, as she was admonished. God's time is now come. She did not expect it, but it always advanced, and at length it found her in the fatal moment when she least thought of it. How many religious men and

women have died thus, in a kind of impenitence, too much resembling the impenitence of sinners! That is to say, they died in their relaxation, in their tepidity, in their customary failings, and in the most dangerous dispositions of mind and heart. How many religious men and women, having at their death sufficient leisure to enter into themselves, and arm themselves with the Sacraments of the Church, have shown, in receiving them for the last time, the same indifference and the same coolness they had during their life! It is a general maxim, which is verified in the religious state, as well as in all others, that men die as they live. How is it that I live? How do I purpose to live for the future? It is thus I shall die. [*Pause and reflect.*]

THIRD POINT.

As the death of sinners is bad, so the Scripture teaches us that the death of the just is precious in the sight of God. *Precious*, because they die without regret, and in a holy disengagement from all things; *precious*, because they die in a confidence full of consolation and sweetness; *precious*, because they die in an intimate union with God, and in exercise of the most excellent virtues; *precious*, because they die in the grace of God, and with the inestimable gift of perseverance. Among these just souls the truly religious do not hold the lowest rank. What, therefore, is the death of a fervent and faithful religious? It is then she begins to taste the fruit of her labours, and to receive the recompense due to them. She dies in peace, and without grief; because she dies perfectly detached from all human things. Her heart is free and disengaged from all that might fix it on earth; and, instead of regretting anything in this world, she thanks God, like David, that He is about to break her ties: "There is no more, O Lord, than the tie of this mortal body, and Thou art going to deliver me from it; I consent thereto." She not only consents to it, but she desires it: "What is there, my God, that I can wish for out of Thee?" and of what importance is the world to me, provided I possess Thee?" She looks on death as the end of her pains, and the beginning of her sovereign happiness. It

appears to the impious to be a total destruction of man ; but she considers it as a passage from the place of her banishment to her blessed and celestial country, and so "feels no torment." She dies in an humble and lively confidence. And what should she fear when, without presuming of herself, and rendering the glory of all to God, she sees herself enriched with all the treasures and merits that she has amassed in religion ? All these merits, dispersed in the course of a long life, unite themselves before her eyes, and fill her with an interior joy that sweetens all the rigours of death. All her thoughts turn towards heaven, whereunto she aspires, and the possession of which is already almost ensured to her. God gives her a foretaste of this eternal felicity, which ravishes and transports her ; so that she may cry out, with the first martyr of the Church, St. Stephen, "I see the heavens open, and Jesus, who waits for me at the right hand of God." She dies in the strictest union with God, and in the exercise of all the virtues which she has so long and so often practised. She formed herself thereto betimes, and she then gathers the fruits of all the holy practices to which she was accustomed. Although dying, and reduced to the utmost weakness by the violence of a distemper, she finds it no way painful to raise herself to God, to immolate herself to God, and to make a sacrifice of her life to God. Being accustomed to all these acts, and to divers others, she enters readily upon them without any effort ; and no sooner is she spoken to and reminded of God than her heart takes fire, and is immediately in a flame. In fine, by a grace above all graces, she dies in final perseverance, which is the consummation of her perseverance, and of her constancy in the accomplishment of the duties of a religious life : for final perseverance supposes a perseverance begun, and it is by the one we arrive at the other. Thus she dies a friend of God, between the arms of God, and in the bosom of God, where her soul goes to repose itself. She passes from the state of sanctity to the state of impeccability—that is to say, from a state wherein, however just and attached she was to God, she might still lose and offend Him, to a state in which she will be forever under the happy necessity of loving and glorifying Him. [*Pause, reflect, make resolutions.*]

SECOND DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On Judgment.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine yourself standing at the bar of Divine Justice.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg the grace of a salutary fear of the judgments of God.

FIRST POINT.

“It is appointed for men once to die, and after death judgment.” Yes, after this death on which we have already meditated will follow the awful judgment of God: it is as inevitable as death itself. The accounting day will come when we must enter upon a strict reckoning with God on the manner we have discharged our duty, on the use we have made of our time; “for we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil.” Such is the irreversible decree of God, which we cannot evade. Knowing as we do that we have to stand such a trial, that we have to stand it before One who is both the Judge and the Witness, that upon that judgment depends our eternal lot, should we not make it the ruling thought of our lives? Should we not often say to our souls: My soul, you must appear before the judgment-seat of God; you must be manifested before the tribunal of Christ? When a person in the world has a trial pending before an earthly judge, suppose there is question of his life, or even of some portion of his worldly substance, his whole thoughts are occupied about it; he reflects on the means of proving his innocence or his right; he prepares himself on every point, he endeavours to fitter away every little doubt; he does not leave unnoticed the most trivial objection that could be proposed against him. And there is a trial which we must inevitably undergo, and at which, if we do not prove our innocence, we shall suffer, not the

death of the body, but the eternal damnation of both body and soul; where, if we do not establish our right, we lose our home, our happiness, our all for eternity. It then behoves us to occupy ourselves in preparing our case for this trial, in forecasting every charge that may be brought against us, in removing even the most trivial ground of objection, because no security is sufficiently great when there is question of eternity. Let us converse with God alone concerning this great day when we shall appear before Him to be judged. As soon as the soul shall have been separated from the body, as soon as the last sigh shall have been fetched, we shall find ourselves in an instant before the Great and Living God. On the very spot where we shall have breathed our last, God will be present, and He will erect there His tribunal, and the creature will be face to face with the Creator. Oh! it is a terrible thing to be thus in the hands of the Living God. Oh! what a moment will that be when, for the first time, we shall see Him, and shall stand naked and alone before Him. And that moment is not, perhaps, far distant. It comes—oh! it comes speedily. It is true that the soul will receive her sentence, her irrevocable sentence; but that sentence, which will then be pronounced in secret, will be repeated one day before a congregated world—that sentence, which will then be addressed to the soul alone, will on the last day be addressed to the soul and body—to the whole man, such as he is now. Let us pass to the consideration of the general judgment, when all that takes place at the particular judgment will be re-enacted, with all the circumstances which the sacred writings attribute to the day of the Lord, “Dies Domini.”

SECOND POINT.

The soul will appear before the judgment-seat of God and hear its doom, and enter upon its enjoyment of happiness, or its purgation or its misery, immediately after death. The body will sleep in the dust of the grave until the day arrive when time is to have an end, and eternity is to commence for all. When that day shall have come, the Angel

of God will sound the trumpet to the four winds of heaven. That wakening blast will be heard by our sleeping ashes, the dead of ages will rise from their slumbers, and every child of Adam will live again. "All nations shall be congregated before Him." Such as I am to-day in this body and soul, such I shall arise, such I shall be summoned to judgment. "In the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God, whom I myself shall see and my eyes shall behold." Yes, we shall see the Son of Man, the poor and humble Jesus, who once stood in the guise of a culprit before a mortal man—Him whom we ourselves beheld in still greater humility in His tabernacles. We shall see Him coming in the clouds of heaven with great power and majesty, and "then the *sign* of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens." The Cross of Christ, the ignominious gibbet of Calvary, will shine refulgent in the air. It will be the trophy of victory and of dominion; it will be in a more special manner the standard of judgment. He who bore it through the streets on His bleeding shoulders now holds it aloft in power to the assembled universe, that everyone may be judged by his conformity to its maxims and to its virtues. And then will be heard wailings of despair from all the tribes of earth; for who has known, who has loved, who has borne the Cross of Jesus Christ? Were the Cross at this moment erected before you, could you say that you are no stranger to it? Could you say that you have taken it up and walked after Jesus? Could you say that long since you have been nailed to it with Christ? If not, the tribes of the earth will weep, and you will weep and wail along with them. The great book is brought forward: it is the memory of God. Come, my soul; the world shall be judged, and so shall you. Yes, you shall be judged as accurately, as circumstantially, as if you alone were to be judged, and as if all the world were to be but the spectators of your judgment. The book is brought forth. Come forward and read the history of your own life; come forward and see what you have placed to your account, and to the account of God's justice. Come forward; every item is in your own handwriting. You will recognize your own

thoughts, your own words, your own actions, your own omissions; and you will recognize them all, from the first deliberate desire of your heart to the last moment when reason sunk bewildered amid the crowding phantoms of death. And for every item of this long list it is written that we shall render an account. Your heart has been a mystery to yourself. What a frightful revelation will be then made to you! Come forward and read! You start with horror! The sins of your life! Oh, God! were they so numerous? I did not think I had committed the millionth part of them. But can you deny one single iota? Oh, no! "Thou art just, O Lord, and just are Thy judgments."

THIRD POINT.

Look again. What! those thoughts, those desires, so detestable, which I formed when under the tyranny of a predominant passion—I could have scarcely acknowledged them to myself; I did not think I was so guilty. But God did not see as I saw, He did not judge as I judged. Read again! Omissions, continuous omissions of duty unheeded and unrepented of. But I did not perceive them. But you should have perceived them, and you had been told a thousand times that unless you meditated well on My law, and on the duties of your state of life, they would escape your notice. You made your holy meditation carelessly, neglected little acts of obedience, shunned all that was mortifying to your self-love, all but despised the fervent fidelity of your sisters, were careless in attaining the spirit of your holy rules. Time is now past. "But I did not know." Your ignorance, too, is written against you; you misspent your precious time; render now an account of those hours and days you spent in idleness. "But I did as others did." But you were told that the greater number were walking in the broad way of perdition; that you, at least, should be an exception to the rest of the world. There is still more against you. Look again: you see the sins of others, aye, and, it may be, the damnation of others, laid to your charge. Those souls to whom you have been an occasion of sin, by your uncharitableness, by your ill-temper, by other means,

they are here foremost: they demand vengeance upon you, they protest against your entrance into heaven, while they are with the damned, and you the cause of their damnation. They, perhaps, never got the grace of repentance which has been so abundantly given to you; they never were withdrawn from the world as you were. But the most dangerous item of your account remains yet. Look again: see the multitude of petty negligences, of petty irreverences and distractions in prayer; of little indulgences of sensuality, in preference given to things and persons; of murmurs and complaints, of jealousies and dislikes; above all, of words of detraction. But were not all these venial sins? I know I should have had to suffer for them, either on earth or in the fire of purgatory; but what have they to do with a judgment which was for eternity? They *were* only venial sins, but were you not told that they were offences against God, and did I not declare to you that the ordinary punishment I reserved for such offences was the withdrawal of My grace? Did not I, who am the Eternal Truth, declare to you that if you neglected small things you would "fall by little and little?" I told you that I would "vomit the tepid out of My mouth." I told you all this, and though you made profession to believe Me and My Gospel, you nevertheless continued to sin. The heavens and the earth may pass, but My Word cannot pass. Read the consequence. You were walking on the boundary-line of mortal sin, and, without perceiving yourself, you passed it. Amongst this multitude of venial sins the matter was sometimes grievous: you swallowed it with the rest, and it never gave you the least uneasiness—no contrition for it, perhaps no confession of it. Oh! time is passed, time is no more! There will be such a revelation of each one's conscience as would make the saints themselves start with terror and amazement. Read on in the book of judgment, read your abuse of grace. Oh, Heavens! for me this is the worst of all. My sacraments, my prayers, my meditations, my knowledge, where are their fruits? *Now* is the time to anticipate the judgment of God; *then* there will be no time to evade it. Let us now search Jerusalem with lamps before God comes to search it; let us hasten, for the filth and uncleanness of its ways will be

made manifest, not only to ourselves, but to all mankind. Let us anticipate this scrutiny of God by scrutinizing ourselves : let us anticipate His accusation by accusing ourselves with humility. Follow up in spirit the sequel of this trial ; consider the final separation of the just and the wicked. Shall I be upon the right hand on that day, or upon the left ? I must be on the one or the other. I shall, undoubtedly, hear addressed to me on that day those words, "Go, you cursed," or those other, "Come, ye blessed." Which do I choose ? I have it now in my power to make the selection. [*Pause, reflect, make resolutions.*]

SECOND DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On Hell.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Figure to yourself an immense pool of fire, burning with brimstone, and hear the despairing shrieks of the unfortunate souls condemned there for all eternity.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg grace so to order your every thought, word, and action as to avoid the flames of Hell.

FIRST POINT.

There is a touching story in the Gospel of St. Luke. It is of a poor man who lay at a rich man's door, just as the poor people now crowd the flags and steps. The man who lived in the mansion neglected the victim of misery. The former was damned, and the latter went to heaven. There is here more than an illustration of the precept of almsgiving, and the consequences of its neglect. The Providence of God is indicated by the heaven of the poor and the hell of the rich. Strange, indeed, should it be if vice could luxuriate

in its iniquity and be clad in the habiliments of its pride; that it should live, and shine, and rule this world so hardly, if in the future one its destiny were not different. If God had no hell for sinners who contemned Him during life, and who died His enemies; if the poor and wretched, who clung to virtue, had only the same lot as those who worship vice, it were a strangely-ruled world, and strange should be our conceptions of the wisdom and justice and sanctity of God. But, blessed be His Name, it is not so. The "faithful and prudent" are not destined to the "fire that ever burneth and the worm that never dieth;" and the prudent virgin who has watched and waited with the oil in her lamp will not be cast into the "exterior darkness," where the unholy suffer without hope. Oh! let us think, and think, and think again. Let us go "down alive into hell," that we may learn to hate even more than we fear it. If Dives could now return to earth after his thousands of years' misery, how would he employ himself for the brief period which would comprehend his life till he should return? In forgetfulness of hell? No; hell would be his dream by night and his meditation by day, and how to avoid its agony his only earthly object forever. We should look with surprise upon his insensibility should he act otherwise, after the awful experience by which he had been taught. Well, are we less certain of its existence than he, or less interested in the consequences of life? Alas! we are not, and we know it. But there is a dreamy torpor, a half-veiling shadow of undefined hope that we shall avoid it, or it is far from us, or God is so good, or a thousand other vagaries of the evil one's creation, that we proceed from day to day hoping that something may occur to make us redeem our pawned souls. Poor human nature! so fond of itself, so devoted to happiness, and yet pausing on the path of a whirlwind of fire, waiting for something undefined which may induce us to move away.

SECOND POINT.

Let us then contemplate the evil—not such as it is, for created lips cannot measure its horrors by language—but let us contemplate the losses and pains and agonies that

must be felt, whence we may form a weak notion of what shall be felt in this home of horror. Tortured memory! racked soul! awful anticipation! May God avert the evil from our door! What must be the tortures of memory! Even life itself sometimes unveils the delusion of the things that are. Youth smiles at childhood's simplicity, and maturity blushes at the inexperienced estimate formed by boyhood. Old age comes on, and the gray-headed man wonders at the fascination which enchants the youth and the man. We live in a life where every succeeding year robs the flower of the past of its hue, and the field of memory of its green. Sitting by our grave's side everything becomes worthless. In hell, then, suffering for the enjoyment of those worthless things, what is to be thought of the torture? We have made such a sacrifice! Such sacrifice for them! Poor soul! one by one the manacles fell off which kept her salient nature from the upward bound to glory. Now she is kept down by the weight of God's hate, and that hatred incurred by momentary, but voluntary, delusion for an object which even we ourselves heartily condemn! Even though the sinner hate God, he feels the loss sustained in losing Him. The affection of a kind parent is a good—we miss it; the devotion of a generous friend is a good, and we weep over the loss of it; the possession of a friend is a happy thing, and the wanderer who has not one, God help him. But all those gathered together and made into ONE GOOD—and all, all crushed! They are blades of grass, but, oh! the Infinite, the Eternal who *gave* those goods and gave the *heart* to enjoy them—He who by these goods gave us a poor perception of how much we may have in Himself—oh! He is lost to us! lost forever!

Look in! Pierce the hideous darkness! Above, below, around, from hell's depths to its roof of adamant—fire! fire! Fire around—fire within you—fire eating your flesh—fire boiling the marrow in your bones—fire through every fibre of your being—packed in fire! never, never to be extinguished. If even one could die—no! death and release equally far away. Never! never! Then for companions you have those whom you hate, whom in baptism you renounced, against whom in confirmation you were armed,

whom by penance you perhaps once had conquered—imagine their victory over their victim! Hear the shrieks, the blasphemies, the yells of tormented demons, the smittings of the helpless criminals! Place yourself alone with an enemy, some hideous wretch, forever! Suppose you were in his power; suppose his means of tormenting you were innumerable; suppose, finally, that neither of you could ever die! In darkness, in fire, in your enemies' hands, forever!

THIRD POINT.

How terribly striking the words of Dives :—"One drop of water." One drop of water is worth an agonizing prayer to an object of former contempt! One drop of water is worth a journey from heaven to hell! One moment's smallest part of the smallest lessening of torture, worth the cry of woe which rises from hell to heaven, even though the damned ones know the eternity that is to follow will, if possible, become more bitter by contrast! Alas! who can tell what the wrath of God can kindle. All the pains of life are pains of love. Put them all together and they are nothing, because hell is the pain of God's eternal and undiminishing hate! What shall we not do, my soul! What shall we not suffer! How shall we not labour to escape the tortures of the damned! Nay, what shall we not do to avoid the smallest approach to the road which leads us away and afar to the regions where heaven's malediction reigns supreme and ever! But the most dreadful of all dreadful thoughts is hell's eternity. No comparison can give an idea of the despair of *no hope*. Accumulate grains of sand until you pile a mountain to the stars, or by a drop of water in a thousand years drown the world—hell's morning shall be only beginning! Ever! Eternity! Let us betimes think on hell! Let us go down to its gate and listen to its howlings. Let us remember that either that place or heaven, the heaven of God, is to be, must be, our *home* forever. Let us remember that this we determine ourselves; it is our own act; no one can drive us thither. "Your appetites are under your feet." This is our time for choosing. Which

shall it be? Hell? Ah, God forbid! Even though there were no pain—nay, even though there were found there every delight of sense instead of all its tortures—we should not have with us our dear, dear God! If we choose heaven, we are not ignorant of what our choice demands—an entire devotion to the attainment of our last end, a devotion which excepts nothing and spares no effort. Aim high, think earnestly, act energetically, knowing the danger which you have to shun. Every sin, no matter what it be, brings you towards it. Mortal sin devotes you to it irrevocably, unless God's wonderful goodness re-establishes the claim and right which you have forfeited. But venial sin brings us on the way towards the abyss, and has brought many a one to the line where the demon-hand clutches them. The surest, the only sure way to avoid hell is to set the Lord steadily and constantly against all sin of every kind, and crave and labour for more union with your Heavenly Spouse. Avoid overconfidence. Think of the saying of St. Augustine, "There never has been committed a sin which anyone may not still commit," if grace be not found in seasonable time: and as that grace must come from God, so far as our own power is concerned, no sin is too enormous not to be perpetrated by any one of us. Remember the examples of those who have proved in their ruin that even the cloister is no seal of certitude that the last day of life shall be a day of glory. Even here grace has often been abused and souls devoted to eternal misery, and the world has triumphed in the falls which commenced in an indifference to the perfection of the state to which God calls us. Let us then strive, aim, watch, and pray that we may be "perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect," and that we may securely defy the machinations of Satan to make us sharers in his miserable abode. [*Pause, reflect, form resolutions.*]

SECOND DAY.

FIRST LECTURE.

On Fidelity.

God derives glory from our fidelity to small things. His glory is derived from the accomplishment of His will, and His will is accomplished by continual attention never to transgress your rules. The opportunities of great sacrifices are rare; besides, on these occasions, the very importance of the subject is a stimulus to fidelity and exertion. Sometimes one momentary effort suffices to complete a great sacrifice. Vanity may corrupt it; but in the daily and unostentatious sacrifices which require perpetual efforts, and which God alone beholds, everything is indeed for Him and for His glory. Whence, then, accrue your merits, and the means of glorifying God in your state? From exactness in fulfilling *all* your duties; from punctuality in yielding immediate obedience to all that is required of you; from that submission of the heart which suffers no interval to elapse between the command and the action; from that spirit of renunciation which, at the first sound of the bell, sacrifices all matters of taste and self-will, and induces you instantly to quit a sister who is speaking to you, an occupation which pleases, or a book which engages you—a sentence commenced, a letter half-formed. This is the fidelity to small things required of you; this is the engagement you have contracted with God; this is what glorifies your Maker. Let not a disordered imagination rove in quest of those shining actions from which the very obscurity of your state disunites you. Fidelity to small things honours God. If I find that I can give Him nothing worthy of His infinite greatness, I give him at least all that I can bestow. I give often, I give promptly, I give with joy, and with all the plenitude of my heart. It is by such fidelity that we glorify God, and prove to Him our love. Love carefully avoids all that can give pain to the object beloved; it seizes on every opportunity of pleasing him. These opportunities frequently occur, and never escape an attentive soul, “the

eyes of whose heart are enlightened," to use the expression of the Apostle. The love which produces such fidelity ought to console you for your inability to offer great things to God. It is to the heart that God looks for the value of our actions ; it is by the heart He judges of them. That heart is surely His, when to please Him it promptly executes whatever its attentive vigilance has discovered to be His will. God Himself becomes to us a model in that minute attention to the smallest things of which we speak. In the order of nature, is this Supreme Being content with walking on the heights of the earth ; with flying on the wings of the wind ; with directing the course of the stars ; with calling at pleasure the tempest or calm ? Has not the same Hand created the lofty mountain and the flower of the valleys, the vast ocean and the minute sands on the shore, the soaring eagle and the creeping insect, the gold which glitters in the palaces of kings, and the obscure dust, destined for the cabin of the poor ? He glories, says St. Augustine, in all the effects of His providence. Nothing is unworthy of Him, because all things proceed from Him. His power is neither exhausted by the creation of the greatest things, nor lessened by the formation of the least. Everywhere He is like to Himself, everywhere He is God. In the order of grace it is by means of the most insignificant elements that He operates in the most august mysteries, and performs the greatest miracles. A little water and a few words efface the original stain—triumph over sin and hell. Some words and the hand of the priest open heaven, and close the abyss. A little bread, some drops of wine, are matter for the greatest of all prodigies, and in their destruction present us that ineffable gift which ravishes heaven and earth. Does not God thus show us the account we should make of small things ; and shall we dare to call them trifles, when He manifests by their instrumentality His power and His glory ? He has declared His sentiments on this head in most express terms : "Well done, good and faithful servant," &c. I expect nothing but what is weak and limited from a mortal. I know who I am ; but your fidelity, your desire to please Me, your eagerness to renew, to multiply the homage due to Me ; the respect and love

which accompany your sacrifices—this it is that honours Me and touches My Heart. In this encouragement which God gives the faithful soul we recognize His wisdom and goodness: His wisdom, which confounds the proud and presumptuous; His goodness, which consoles the weak and pusillanimous. First, the presumptuous man exalts himself, and, disdaining small things, soars to the summits of the mountains. He must do great things, practise great mortifications, perform great and sublime exercises of devotion; yet God says to him: Awake from the sleep of pride, descend from the pinnacle on which vanity has placed you: your pretended elevation is but vain delirium; seek in the painful and constant observance of the smallest duties true and solid virtue, and greatness of soul, which thou hast never known. Secondly, the pusillanimous man is disturbed in mind, because he thinks he does nothing; although, if he be faithful in small things, he does all that is required. In fact, fidelity to small observances includes many great virtues. A spirit of zeal, which omits no opportunity of pleasing and honoring God; a spirit of renunciation, which, embracing that obscure detail which restrains the human heart, demands much from nature, and leaves no recompense to vanity; a spirit of gratitude, which, glowing with fervor at the view of the benefits of the Lord, is eager to multiply and increase acts of thanksgiving; a spirit of humility, which, seeing an infinite disproportion between man's efforts and the merits of God, supplies for the mediocrity of its sentiments by their continuance, and leaves no interval between the exercise of fidelity and love; a spirit of strength and generosity, which, in its constant attention to little things, marks days, hours, and even moments, by so many sacrifices. At one time the spirit of sloth endeavours to arrest our efforts; at another, our tepidity is inclined to draw back. Now our independence is ready to shake off the yoke and to revolt; again, sensual joy is ready to dissipate us; a thought attempts to distract, a feeling to enervate, a desire to divide us. What can be opposed to all this? The voice of Christian wisdom, the voice of love, which incessantly exclaims—Fidelity! Fidelity!

THIRD DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the Standard of Jesus Christ and Lucifer.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you hear our Divine Lord addressing to you the words, “Come, follow Me.”

SECOND PRELUDE.—Implore the grace always to follow in the footsteps of your Divine Master.

FIRST POINT.

Consider Lucifer, the prince of this world, sitting on a throne of fire full of smoke, having a horrible figure and dreadful countenance, surrounded by innumerable devils, the dukes and princes of this darkness, who consult about making war against Jesus Christ our Lord, and erecting their standard against the standard of the Cross. To which effect they have set their snares of temptation for men, to entrap them in those three vices which St. John calls the “concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, and pride of life:” first inviting them to the delights of the flesh, whence proceed the vices of gluttony and luxury; afterwards to the desire of honour and wealth, whence proceed the vices of covetousness and ambitions; after that to the pride of life, which is a desire of our own excellency, with presumption of ourselves, and of our private opinion. And it is called pride of life, because it is pride that is lively and swelling, which always lives and increases, budding forth other vices and sins of the world. Then I will ponder the rage with which the devils range about the whole world, without leaving any, the least corner unsearched, “seeking whom they may devour,” as lions, with the force and violence of persecutions; and as dragons, with the subtlety of their apparent reasons, to deceive men, and to lure them to their service; the destruction which they cause being exceedingly great, for they seduce innumerable souls, some of whom give themselves to the pursuit of pleasures; others

to the greed of riches and of worldly honours; others to pride and loftiness of life; and, lastly, they enrol under their standard all the enemies of the Cross of Christ, "whose end is destruction," as St. Paul says. With this consideration, imitating the same apostle, with tears will I excite my compassion that there are so many who follow the standard of the devil, wondering that they are so foolish as to follow him, believing that the recompense of their service will be to dwell with him in hell. And, reflecting on my past or present life, I will deplore my having remained for any time in this pernicious error, beseeching our Lord to deliver me from it.

SECOND POINT.

I will consider Christ our Lord seated in an humble place, with a pleasing and loving countenance, surrounded by His disciples, and with many other persons, saying to all, "If anyone will come after Me, let him daily take up his cross, deny himself, and follow Me." In these words, in opposition to the prince of this world, He invites men to *three things*. First, to deny themselves, mortifying the three concupiscences of the world, and the other vices which proceed from them—that is, that they deny and mortify the love of sensual pleasures, and the greedy desire of worldly riches and gain, vain glory, and interior pride, mortifying their own judgment and their own will, and all presumption and desire of superiority.

Secondly, He calls them *to carry their cross*, offering themselves to all that is repugnant to the three eager desires of the world—that is to say, to endure labours and sorrows, poverty and contempt, with all manner of humiliation and subjection; because the spiritual cross of Jesus Christ is composed of these three things—pain, poverty, and contempt—each of them comprehending sundry different mortifications which accompany it. And this cross He requires that all men carry every day, bearing that part which daily and hourly shall befall them with perfect perseverance, even unto death. Thirdly, He therefore calls them, that they *should imitate His holy virtues*, and the

example He giveth them of abnegation, and patiently supporting their own cross ; as He is resolved to admit none into His school, nor to His company, who do not resolve to embrace the same, and to settle themselves under this standard. And so He says that whosoever “taketh not up his cross and cometh after Me, he cannot be My disciple, and is not worthy of Me.” Then will I ponder how exceedingly reasonable this vocation is : for if I be evil, and from my birth inclined to vices and iniquities, it is most just I should deny myself, and mortify all my wicked inclinations, to emancipate myself from all the evils which spring from thence. And if pleasures, riches, honours, and worldly excellences are the source of all sorts of evils, it is but reasonable that I leave the inordinate love I feel towards them, to save myself from such great miseries. And if in this mortal life many labours, toils, sorrows, and tribulations will befall me, how can I do better than to make a virtue of necessity, and embrace my cross with a willing mind, thus to merit life everlasting ? And since Jesus Christ our Lord came down from heaven to carry His Cross, and to embrace pain, and disgrace, and contempt, what wonder if I do that which my Captain, my King, and my God has done ?

THIRD POINT.

Consider three most effectual reasons which Jesus Christ our Lord uses to persuade us to this vocation. The first is, that “whosoever will save his life shall lose it ; for he that shall lose it for my sake shall save it”—that is to say, “Your salvation, your everlasting life, is in denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Me, even to the loss of your temporal life for this cause, if need require, as I lost Mine ; and whosoever shall lose it after this manner shall not altogether lose it, because I will return him a better for it, and one eternal.” And in the same manner I may imagine Christ our Lord to say to me : “He who for Me shall lose his goods, his honour, his pleasures, his friends, or other temporal profit, he shall afterwards find it ; and, contrariwise, he who seeketh to save or preserve the same

contrary to My will, he shall lose it, and together with it his soul forever."

The second reason is:—"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?" As if He had said: "If thou follow the devil's suggestion, and not My vocation, sure thou art to lose thy soul everlastingly; for what will it avail thee to have enjoyed all the pleasures, riches, honours, and excellences of the world, if after all this thy soul be damned? Ask thou of those that are burning in hell, and they will tell thee: "What hath our pride profited us, or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? Pleasures, honours, dignities, and all the goods of the whole earth—what profit have they brought us? All is passed like a shadow, and now for our malice we are plunged into perpetual torments." The third reason is, because *the Son of Man shall come in the glory* of his Father, with His angels, "and then will He render to every man according to his works;" which is to say: "I will come to judge the world with the sign and standard of My Cross, and those who would not carry the same with Me shall be condemned with the devils to everlasting fire, whose colours they followed; but those who have hearkened to My vocation, and have embraced My Cross, I will lead with Me to the glory of My Father."

Pondering these three reasons, I will compare those two vocations—that which Lucifer makes with that which is made by Christ our Lord; the disastrous end which is made by those who follow the one, with the fortunate end which is made by those who follow the other. And since it is not possible, as our Redeemer says, at once to "serve two" different "masters," "God and Mammon," Jesus Christ and vain honours; nor possible to put myself under the banners of such hostile captains, I will endeavour to shut my ears to the suggestions of Satan, and open them to the vocation of Jesus Christ, denying myself, embracing my cross, and following my Sovereign Captain under His banner. For which purpose it will be a help to consider which of them I would wish to have followed at the hour of my death, and when I shall see myself presented to

judgment before the tribunal of Jesus Christ. Which of the two should I then wish to have chosen—riches or poverty, honours or contempt, pleasures or afflictions, the accomplishment of my own will or the abnegation of it, and of myself? And I will now make choice of that which I would have wished to have chosen then. And not to put off to the hour of death or judgment the certainty of this good election, I add that the vocation of the devil, which, although at first sight it promises delights, honours, riches, liberty, and repose, yet all these are so intermingled with bitterness that, to say the truth, they are most painful. Even the damned themselves confessed that they “wearied themselves in the way of iniquity, and that they walked through hard ways.” On the contrary, the vocation of Christ, although it treat of abnegation and crosses, it is so proportioned by the Divine Providence, so fitted and suited to everyone’s strength, and mingled with such sweetness and celestial graces, that truly it is most sweet, even in this life; so that those who followed the devil’s standard find a great refreshment in following Christ, even as our Lord Himself said: “Come to Me all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you; take up My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls, for My yoke is sweet and My burden light.” That is to say: “Although My yoke be self-denial, yet it is sweet; and although My burden be the Cross, yet it is light to such as are meek and humble like Myself: for I give My grace unto the humble which renders that all sweet and light which otherwise of itself is sour and heavy.”

THIRD DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On the Nativity.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Revolve in mind the journey of the Blessed Virgin with St. Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem; her distress for a lodging, her retreat to a stable.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Represent to yourself the Divine Infant laid in a manger. Beg of Him a love of poverty and humility.

FIRST POINT.

Consider what the Blessed Virgin did when by those transports of joy she knew that the hour of her delivery had come, pondering her affections, her actions, and her words. Retiring to a corner of the stable, and settled in very high contemplation, she brought forth her only begotten Son, and forthwith she took Him in her arms. Oh, what content and joy she received at that first view, not staying upon the outward beauty of the body, but passing to the beauty of the soul and of the Godhead! On the one side she embraced Him and kissed Him lovingly as her Son, and on the other she shrunk back and humbly retired, considering that He was Almighty God; for with these two arms God desires to be embraced; with charity and humility; with love and reverence; and so am I to do spiritually, taking Him as it were in my arms, loving and reverencing Him; approaching to Him with love, and withdrawing myself with humility.

This done, the Virgin Mother swathed her Son in such swaddling clothes and mantles as she had prepared, and with an affection of humility laid Him in a manger, esteeming herself unworthy to hold Him in her arms; and, falling on her knees, she adored Him as her God and her Lord, and also very lovingly spoke to Him, for she was assured

that He understood her. She humbly thanked Him for the great favour He had done to mankind in coming to redeem them. She likewise gave Him thanks for having taken her for His Mother, without any merit of hers; and there she offered to serve Him with body and soul, and with all her powers, employing them all in His holy service; and all this she uttered with such loving words and tender affections as are rather to be imagined than explained. The like, doubtless, did St. Joseph, adoring the Child—humbly thanking Him for taking Him for His foster father, also acknowledging it for a great favour, and offering himself truly and really to serve Him. The like am I also to do, accompanying these saints in hearty thankfulness, offering to Him my body and soul, and all my faculties.

SECOND POINT.

Consider more in detail the humiliations and sufferings that accompany the poverty of your Divine Redeemer at His birth. He takes human nature among His chosen people, but they receive Him not; they refuse Him even a shelter, and force Him to lodge with brute beasts, as the outcast of mankind. Behold Him exposed to the inclemencies of a cold winter's night, bereft even of the few comforts which the house of Nazareth might have afforded Him. As His incarnation is the grand lesson of humility, His nativity sweetly teaches poverty. This He assumes by choice as a fixed and settled condition, and this He resolves to practise until death—even the death of the Cross! Compare your life with that of Jesus Christ—surely, it is comparative opulence, and would be thought such by a person really poor. If Christians in general are bound to withdraw their affections from the riches of this world, it is not too much for you to renounce them in reality, or to practise the rules of poverty even to the letter, for these will leave you still far different from the poverty of Bethlehem. Nothing is more necessary, or more frequently inculcated in the religious life, than perfect disengagement of heart and mind from all created objects.

THIRD POINT.

Reflect how much more becoming to God and His Son was this manner of birth than any other that could have been imagined. What addition could the most sumptuous attendance and most gorgeous circumstances of Oriental pomp have been to His own proper splendour and glory? Suppose Him laid in a bed of state, as rich as gold and jewels and imperial purple could have made it. What would He have gained? He would have been more like an earthly monarch's son, destined to grow up a haughty, imperious tyrant. Men would have approached Him, though an infant, with a certain awe; they would have been more engaged in contemplating the dazzling objects that surround Him than in gazing upon His own charms and meditating upon His own glories. But, as we now see Him, it is Himself that we love and reverence. In the other case, the more tender feelings would have had but little room to play. What compassion, what interest, could we have taken in Him? What could we have called our own? He would have seemed to be able to give rather than to receive. We should have retired abashed from His presence, feeling that we could afford no service to one so magnificently attended. But, as it is, He is indeed raised above all those circumstances which shed some lustre round the birth of the great, and we find Him upon His bed of straw more glorious and majestic than an infant sovereign upon a gilded cradle. He is surrounded by His own glory, a glory which we feel is superior to the want of all outward aids. But then, in addition, He seems to us all our own. We may go in, together with the shepherds, and feel no timid reserve. We find none but Mary and Joseph there, both of whom we so well know and love. We salute them familiarly: the one, grave, yet mild, seems to welcome us; the other, all gentleness, and smiling with the fondness of a young mother's heart, kindly encourages us to approach. She takes her veil from over the little straw bed, and shows us the face of her Dear Little Babe, all smiling, and bright as heaven. She allows us to look upon Him with all affection, and admire His beautiful features—beautiful, indeed, beyond

the children of men. And if we feel and exhibit extraordinary fervour of love, she allows us to take into our arms the lovely Infant, to fondle Him and caress Him. We feel at home in such good and simple company, as much as we should have been repelled by the pomps of state. Great wisdom, then, and goodness were shown in this manner of birth being chosen by the Son of God. Bless and thank your Divine Saviour for having suffered so much at His birth, that He might endear Himself to you.

THIRD DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On the Hidden Life of Jesus Christ.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you see the Child Jesus return with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg a great love for the hidden life.

FIRST POINT.

This is, without doubt, one of the greatest mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ; and how obscure soever this mystery may be, it is no less worthy of admiration than those which shine more splendid in the eyes of men. It is the retreat in which this Divine Master lived until the time of His preaching. This Man-God who was replenished with all the treasures of wisdom and science; who possessed in a supreme degree all the gifts of nature and of grace; who might have shone in the world and attracted the esteem and veneration of all men; this Man-God, who, to the age of thirty years, might have wrought so many wonders for the glory of His Father, if He had made Himself known; who might have converted all the sinners, all the idolaters, and have spread the Gospel through the whole earth: this Man-God, who was sent for that purpose, and who, for that end

alone, had descended from heaven, confined Himself, notwithstanding, to a hidden life, and, of the thirty-three years which He had to remain amongst us, passed thirty of them in silence and solitude, and reserved but three to show Himself in public, and to announce the kingdom of God.

What did He do during these thirty years of a private and retired life? *He was subject to Mary and Joseph.* This is what we are told: we know nothing more of it. He was willing to bury all the rest in darkness, so that God only was witness thereof. Such conduct at first seems not a little surprising, but the secret cause of it is not difficult to discover. He would by this means suppress in us that desire of appearance which is so natural to us, and which occasions so many disorders in religious houses. It is not possible that a religious can be solidly devoted to God if she be altogether exterior; and nothing was more capable of moderating that eagerness of showing ourselves to the world, and distinguishing ourselves therein, than the example of a God in solitude and willingly unknown to the world: for this example takes from me all the pretences which I might have, and which self-love knows so artfully how to suggest to us, in persuading us that the glory of God and the salvation of our neighbour are concerned therein; that it is necessary on such and such occasions; that decency requires it; that it serves to maintain charity; that there must be society in life; that a seclusion so rigid renders us unprofitable, and hinders us from making the most of the talents we have received. Specious reasons, with which I would but in vain countenance myself! Can I contribute more to the glory of God than Jesus Christ? Ought I to be more interested in the salvation of my neighbour than He was? Does the world stand more in need of me, or am I more necessary therein? Do I know better what is suited and what is not so? Am I more zealous for the maintenance of society and of charity? Have I more brilliant talents, from which more fruit is to be expected? Vain soul, learn to undeceive and confound thyself! Instead of these maxims, which a worldly spirit inspires me with, even in religion, my Saviour is come to teach me a line of conduct which is directly opposite to this, and to which I ought to adhere—that is, to

love to be unknown, to be forgotten, to be forsaken, not only by the rest of men, but by the community wherein I live : being charged with no other employment, no other affair, but the observance of my rule, without embarrassing myself or meddling in any of the affairs of the world. Such ought to be my disposition, without prejudice, notwithstanding, to the obedience I owe my superiors. If they will make use of me, whether at home or abroad, I must obey them, and acquit myself, with as much perfection as I can, of the functions to which they shall destine me. But when I shall act in this manner, and when, above all, I shall not appear abroad but when commanded by my superiors, and as much as I am commanded, I will appear much more seldom in public, and by this means God will be more glorified, the world will be more edified, the spirit of my state will be better preserved, and all my functions will be more faithfully and more holily performed. I have, then, but to wait in peace for the orders of Providence, and, as long as it shall permit me to remain in obscurity, I ought to rejoice at it, cherish my retreat, and say, with the Royal Prophet, "I have chosen to be an abject, and the last in the house of my God."

SECOND POINT.

What were the occupations of Jesus Christ in His hidden life? If we may judge of them by appearance, they were humble in themselves, commonplace and servile. He labored with Joseph, He shared with Mary the necessary cares for the good order of that holy family ; He executed punctually what the one and the other prescribed to Him, without omitting or neglecting the most menial offices. What an employment for the Messias sent from above, and for the only Son of God ! Yet God was as much glorified by these actions as by the greatest that this Saviour of Men was afterwards to perform. God accepted them, and seeing Him devoted to such exercises, He already said of Him, though with less solemnity and less splendour than on the day of His baptism, "Behold my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Why so? Because in all these actions

Jesus Christ conformed Himself to the good pleasure of His Father, because all these actions were animated by an interior spirit, and elevated by views altogether divine. Hence it was that they were so meritorious before God, and so agreeable in His sight.

There were at that time princes and emperors on earth. There were famous conquerors, who filled the world with their name and with the renown of their heroic actions. Their designs, their enterprises, and their memorable exploits were spoken of: they were published and extolled throughout the whole world; but they were nothing in the estimation of God, and, as He was neither the principal nor the end of them, they were disregarded by Him. On the contrary, Jesus Christ was not spoken of: He was unknown as to His name, His birth, His dwelling-place, His life, and the manner in which He employed Himself. He resided in a corner of Judea, as if He was not there, but God had His eyes continually on Him, without withdrawing them for a single moment: He was an object worthy the attention of heaven, and there was not one of His actions but was of infinite value. What support and what cause of confidence for a religious person, who in his state is employed in exercises which the world makes no account of! They are often even the last and the most humiliating offices of a house. But what consoles such a religious, and, in effect, is most comfortable to her, is this saying of the Apostle, which she applies to herself, "You are dead, and your life is hidden in God with Jesus Christ;" for when it is a life hidden in God, it is a life pleasing to God, and, consequently, holy; and since it is a life hidden with Jesus Christ, it is a life entirely conformable to the life of Jesus Christ, to His spirit, and to His sentiments. What life should I wish for more than a life which unites me in this manner to my God, and gives me so close a resemblance to my Saviour and my model? This is, properly speaking, the interior life, and in such a life is there anything so low and so contemptible in appearance that I ought not to prize at the highest rate? It would be degenerating from my profession to regulate the esteem I have for things by any other rule than according to the sanctity which is attached to them, and the will of God,

which is thereby accomplished. With the one and with the other everything is great and of inestimable value.

THIRD POINT.

With what repose was the solitude of Jesus Christ accompanied, and what peace did He not find therein ! Being unknown to the world, He was not exposed to its discourses nor subject to its contradictions. In the narrow enclosure of a poor cottage, where He kept Himself shut up, and where He confined Himself to His labor, He had no share in all the movements and turmoils which agitated the rest of men. He enjoyed the silence and calm of His solitude in tranquillity ; and if He entertained Himself, it was in the secret of His soul, with His Father, from whom He received the most sensible and sweet communications. Of all the blessings we can desire on earth, it is certain that peace is one of the most precious ; but it is no less certain that the most assured means to acquire this peace, whether interior or exterior, is a retired and hidden life. The world is like a raging sea, whereas a cloister is like a port and asylum, where a person is sheltered from all its storms. It is for this reason that worldlings themselves esteem a religious profession, and say, on many occasions, that good religious men or women are a thousand times happier and more contented in their cells than men of the world are amidst the tumults and embarrassments of a secular life. The most worldly people speak thus, and in this they speak the truth more than perhaps they think, but they would be more fully convinced thereof had they but some experimental knowledge of the solid sweetness a soul tastes which is accustomed and knows how to confine itself to a private and secluded life. It has its occupations, which obedience has assigned it. These functions are not distinguishing, and it is for this very reason they are more pleasing. It acquits itself of them with fidelity, but without desiring to engage in any other affairs. Thus it is but little concerned about what passes in the world, and overlooks a thousand events which are to so many others a source of inquietude and chagrin ; it is often unacquainted with them, and does not

even desire to know anything about them. And how should such a soul be disquieted at what happens abroad, since she scarce knows the half of what happens at home in the interior of the community? It neglects and passes by such things as do not concern it, and in which charity and the common good of the house are not interested, for this is what religious life exacts. Ah! what a peaceful life would religious lead if they learned this hidden spirit betimes, and if they knew how to erect a solitude in their own hearts. But it seems as if we were a burden to ourselves. We would have a share in everything, and, to satisfy our desires, we would be everywhere. If we are prevented, it is a pain, and if suffered to follow our natural impetuosity, and to go wherever it leads us, it is the principle of a still greater evil; for it is not possible that the diversity of objects and the different interests into which we enter should not excite many desires and many passions by which the peace of the heart is disturbed. The cloister and the cell become sweet in proportion as we confine ourselves to them, but it is in quitting them too often and for too long a time that we render them insupportable to ourselves. Why should I seek my happiness on earth, so far off and out of myself, when, with God, and with His grace, I may find it in myself and in the midst of myself? O Jesus! teach me how to spend a hidden life unknown to the world and known only to Thee. Amen.

THIRD DAY.

FIRST LECTURE.

On Prayer.

Prayer, says St. Augustine, should be continual. This continual prayer is nothing more than the desires of a Christian soul, habitually elevated by faith, hope, and charity, above this earth. At stated times we use particular forms of prayer, but these are either the mere expression of our habitual desires, or a means to re-animate the fervour

of these desires, whence the holy doctor concludes that the fruits of prayer ought to be abundant, in proportion as the disposition of the heart is perfect. Now, do you bring this preparation of the heart to prayer? Do you cherish and nurture those desires which should elevate you above nature and the senses, uniting you to God, and establishing you in that interior life in which a religious breathes but for her Lord? All the resources of your holy state are destined to maintain, to perfect, this life of faith and love. Do you profit of those means as carefully as the spirit of your vocation requires? Do you detach yourself from sensible and created objects, leaving room in your soul for the operation of divine grace? In a word, do you dispose yourself, by purity of heart, to pray with that calm tranquillity and peace which is almost always the effect of prayer? I say almost always, for I know that involuntary distractions may be experienced in prayer. With St. Francis of Sales, I assure you that it is overstrained exactness not to wish to hear even the movement of a leaf in prayer; with St. Teresa, that we often abandon prayer when we begin to make it best—that is to say, less according to our own inclinations, and more according to the will of God; with all the masters of morality, that what is not voluntary, either in itself or in its cause, is not attributable to us. I allude at present to those distractions which are a rational cause of remorse, because resulting from a tepid and imperfect life, an habitual neglect of recollection and self-examination, the indulgence of useless thoughts, immortified desires, resistance to the inspirations of grace. A life so irregular, and so opposed to the spirit of your vocation, is incompatible with the spirit of prayer. Nevertheless, this spirit of prayer is absolutely necessary to dispose you for actual prayer, and to enable you to discharge this important duty with tranquillity and profit. Unless you have the spirit of prayer, you have cause to fear that in you will be verified the saying of Jesus Christ: “All those who say Lord, Lord, shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” When animated by this spirit of prayer, a faithful soul prays at all times, and at all places. She is always united to God, and her exterior actions, being sanctified by the interior spirit whence they

spring, can never prove an obstacle to the fervour of actual prayer. When the heart is pure and detached, the mind is free and recollected. Tell me what are your inclinations, and I will tell you what are your thoughts. If you adhere to nothing created and sensible, you will be more tranquil in prayer. Thus, the best way to prepare yourself to pray and meditate well is to live well. You complain of being distracted at prayer. This does not astonish me. Instead of complaining, you should investigate the cause of these distractions, and remove it. You should use the means most conducive to recollection and fervor. These means are the practice of the presence of God, the love of silence, a guard on the senses, an exact vigilance over your heart, a respectful attention to the voice of the Lord, fervent and frequent remembrance of Him. Even exterior actions will conduce to this end, if performed in the spirit of love. It is thus that a religious preserves and fortifies that life of the spirit which disposes her for the most intimate communications with God. It may be said in one sense that her prayer is continual, because the interior spirit which animates her, the constant view of God which sanctifies her, the habitual desire to please Him which characterizes her, are all proof of generous, persevering love; and to love constantly is to pray without ceasing. How do you pray? You surely do not want for considerations with which to occupy your mind piously and profitably? How numerous are the subjects of meditation calculated to enlighten the understanding and inflame the heart!—all fruitful sources of light and love! At one time the economy of the creation, the connection between the creature and his Creator, the greatness of man's origin, the dignity of his end, the sublimity of his hopes, the extent of his duties. At other times, the beauty of the new alliance, the Divinity of its Author, the elevation of His maxims, the wisdom of His laws, the purity of His morality, the tenderness of His promises. Again, the mysteries and benefits of the Redeemer, His greatness and His humiliations, His opprobrium and His glory, His love and His Cross, His death and His triumph. On other occasions the examples and virtues of this Divine Model; His humility, His modesty,

His silence, His patience, His profound submission to the orders of His Father—a life of sacrifice and love. At other times we see that, in order to form in our hearts the spirit of Christ, we have passions to combat, inclinations to repress, temptations to conquer, desires to moderate, repugnances to surmount, motives to purify, virtues to acquire or perfect. At another time we consider the greatness of God, His power, His wisdom, His goodness, His sanctity; and these considerations, well digested by a religious, and applied to the circumstances in which she is placed, afford her such subjects of meditation as are most suited to her personal wants, and therefore most profitable. The consideration of the greatness of God will remind you that He has deigned to communicate to you a portion of His attributes, placing you in a sublime rank, raising you above the world, and associating you with those pure virgins whom He honours with the title of His spouses. In His power you will recognize that gentle compulsion which withdrew you from the dangers of the world, and, perhaps, rescued you from the tyranny of your passions, to lead you into this holy retreat. The consideration of His wisdom will recall the many events which He rendered subservient to your salvation—the various circumstances which He arranged to draw you into solitude, and remove the impediments which opposed themselves to your vocation. The view of His goodness will certainly speak to your heart of the love of special predilection and great preference evinced for you. From His sanctity you will learn your happy obligation of tending to perfection, of acquiring new merit, of enjoying more consolation, of aspiring to a greater recompense. If you be penetrated with these considerations at prayer, you will find it accompanied by that recollection, humility, and fervor which are essential to the worthy discharge of this holy exercise. Recollection is nothing more than the silence of adoration, which separates you from every created object, enables you to occupy yourself with God alone, with His perfections and His amiability. Humility teaches you to judge of your unworthiness and ingratitude by the extent of the Divine benefits. Fervor discovers in the reflections which grace inspires the most pressing motives to pursue

generously the service of God, and to increase in His love. God speaks to the heart in prayer. How eloquent is His voice ! What great things the God of Sanctity would operate within us if we were only docile to His inspirations ! Even one of His words, remembered by a faithful and attentive soul, enlightens, moves, inflames her. She sees what God reproaches her with, what He demands of her ; and as she has presented herself at prayer with a fund of good will, she acquiesces, she yields to grace, she makes a generous sacrifice, which often influences the whole course of her life ; for one single moment's correspondence with the attraction of the Divine Spirit, one efficacious resolution, often suffices to induce the Almighty to open to us His Heart, and give Himself irrevocably to us. In this spirit of fidelity and sacrifice consists the merit of prayer, which to be truly fruitful must exercise a constant influence over our conduct. What fruit do you derive from prayer ? Prayer is a mutual intercourse between God and the soul ; God speaks with a view to be heard : He gives in order to receive in return. It is a sacred banquet, wherein the divine attributes are presented to us, not only for our admiration, but as food to strengthen our souls, and bring them to the maturity of perfect virtue. It is a holy communion wherein we possess God, on the condition that He shall possess us. If in opposition to these principles you bring to prayer a mind distracted, pre-occupied with a thousand useless thoughts ; a heart captivated by its passions, attached to its idols, little moved by the attractions of grace ; if in the devotion of yourself to God you introduce reservation unworthy of Him, determining to adhere to Him as long as His service requires no great effort ; to give some moments to Him, retaining the rest for yourself, and to divide a heart which He wishes to possess entirely ; if in consequence of this disposition you limit yourself in prayer to half projects of perfection, to vague resolutions, to wavering promises ; if you will only contemplate truth in that dim twilight favourable to your idleness and indolence ; if you will only gaze on the Sun of Justice through the clouds with which your passions obscure its rays, is it surprising that you derive so little profit from prayer ? Can you be astonished if you

retain the same imperfections and the same weaknesses—not those inevitable weaknesses, the sad appendages of our natural frailty, with which all have to reproach themselves, but those voluntary weaknesses into which you habitually relapse; those multiplied imperfections, which make so little impression on you; that fund of tepidity and immortification, which you combat so negligently? Ah! let us not henceforward lose the fruit of prayer. It should enlighten us with respect to our duties, and develop their extent. Shall we shut our eyes to the light, and slothfully resist those salutary truths which contradict our inclinations? It should furnish us with arms to triumph over nature and the passions. Shall we then fear any difficulties we have to conquer; shall we always be incapable of an effort over ourselves? It should form the interior man within us, daily adding to the perfection of our spiritual being; and instead of attaining “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ,” shall we always languish in that state of infancy in which the portrait exists, but in its outlines? It should unite us to God; but we can attain to this union only by renouncing a thousand superfluities, of which the jealous spirit requires the sacrifice. Shall we refuse what a God demands of us, for His glory, for our salvation, for our perfection, for our happiness? One of the most efficacious means to establish the kingdom of God within you, one of the principal effects which prayer should produce, is the correction of our predominant passion—the destruction of that strong tendency which most impedes your progress to God, and opposes the greatest obstacles to His grace. For example, you want humility—a reproach irritates, a word inflames you. Employ the time of prayer in confounding yourself before God; ask Him to grant you the spirit of abjection; determine to accept a humiliation, to suffer a reproach, to endure a mortifying rebuke in silence. Be faithful to the resolutions you have formed, and by reiterated acts destroy your pride and self-esteem. You have to reproach yourself with the infraction of silence; you neglect certain points of your rules and constitutions, which are too great a restraint; and, shaking off the yoke of the law, you aim at freedom and at emancipation from all

subjection. Having discovered in yourself these abuses, so contrary to the spirit of regularity, you can easily infer the necessity of greater recollection, more exactness, more attention to your duties. You assist at the office without preparation, allowing your mind to wander amidst frivolous thoughts, foreign to this act of religion; you omit prayer, and pursue occupations dictated by inclination and humour; you defer it, and you have not the same merit when the time of grace and favour is passed; you commence it without recollection and without an interior spirit, and you perform it ill. Let prayer serve to correct the defects of prayer itself. Ask for the spirit of prayer, fidelity, fervor, union with God. You are attached to your own opinion, indocile, always ready to reason on the orders of your superiors. Prayer, tending to correct these faults, would surely be of the greatest utility. If you lament your weakness before God, if you promise sincerely to amend, your promise cannot fail to exercise an influence over your conduct which will be marked by more simplicity, more obedience, more self-abnegation. You are naturally of a harsh and austere, or perhaps a hot and hasty temper; you yield to prejudices, suspicions, antipathies, and resentments which wound charity. Strive to overcome yourself; direct your attention to this point in prayer and in your exams. Ask of God that spirit of meekness, peace, and concord which should ever animate the true religious. You feel nothing but difficulty and aridity in prayer, disgust and weariness in your exercises, repugnance and lassitude in the discharge of spiritual duties. Consult God in prayer, and you will soon discover the source of this disgust, this aridity. You will see that it proceeds from too great eagerness and activity in the pursuit of exterior things; from too great a facility for interrupting recollection, and yielding to dissipation; from an excessive attachment which captivates you; from the persistent refusal of some sacrifice which God demands. Confused at your tepidity, re-animate your fervour in the exercise of prayer; make the sacrifice required of you; moderate your activity, renounce your vain attachment; and, in order to experience more unction in the discharge of your duties, serve God more unreservedly and

more purely. You cannot, then, occupy the time of prayer in a manner more agreeable to God, and more meritorious to yourselves, than in directing it to the conquest of your passions, particularly that which predominates. This passion being subdued, the weaker propensities to evil which march in its train will oppose but a weak resistance, and afford an easy victory. To attack one passion vigorously and to destroy it, is to establish the opposite virtue solidly on its ruins. Such will be the blessed effects of assiduous and fervent prayer. It is from prayer that the man of faith derives those spiritual arms which render him superior to his enemies; it is in prayer that his youth is renewed like the eagle's; and that grace, like the spirit once borne on the waters, strengthens and perfects virtue. Happy moments, in which heaven opens, and pours its treasures on a soul which seeks God in repose and silence! How sublime the soul, which soars above earth, borne on the wings of prayer! How powerful, how sweet, the love derived from the sacred fire of prayer! How pure the life of the just man, formed according to the example of the Man-God, and directed by truth itself in the light of prayer! How great is the value of this holy exercise! "He," says St. Augustine, "knows how to live well who knows how to pray well." Prayer will regulate, will perfect your conduct, which, in turn, will prove the holiness of your prayer; and having adored the Lord in time, and meditated on His perfections with a view to imitate them, you will see, you will contemplate Him face to face in the splendour of His glory.

FOURTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the Reign of Jesus Christ in a Religious Soul.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you hear the words: “Take upon you my yoke, and you shall find rest to your souls,” addressed to you.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg the grace of great generosity in the service of God.

FIRST POINT.

The reign of Jesus Christ is interior, and consists in banishing from my soul every other spirit than that of Jesus Christ; in judging of nothing but according to the maxims of Jesus Christ; in loving nothing but according to the sentiments of Jesus Christ; in reviving in me, by a constant and habitual practice, all the virtues of Jesus Christ; so that Jesus Christ may govern me in all things, may regulate me in all things, and that He may make me undertake and accomplish all things. This reign of Jesus Christ is not of this world—that is to say, it is not a reign where Jesus Christ, like other kings, shows Himself in pomp and splendor, nor where by the power of arms He seeks to extend His conquests and acquire subjects. On the contrary, He only manifests Himself in the most impoverished, the most obscure, and the most humiliating state; and if He obtains victories it is by the attractions of that state to which He abased Himself, and unto which He would be reduced. A soul moved to see Him march before her as her head, and to behold Him take the most thorny and narrow road, is excited to follow Him. She delivers herself up entirely to Him, and abandons herself to his conduct without reserve. Into whatever way He is pleased to call her she enters generously; she continues therein inviolably; she perseveres and advances therein constantly. His examples are orders to her, and she would blush that any

difficulty should retard her when her Divine Master would experience them all, and teaches her to surmount them. "Let us go," says she, like St. Thomas, "and let us die with Him." "The disciple is not above His Master, nor the servant above His Lord," nor the creature above his God. It is He, then, who leads her; He who gives her impression and motion at each step she takes; He who determines her, who encourages, and who supports her. It is a submission without reserve, and the dependence is perfect. Behold what our Saviour invites us to when He says, "Take upon you My yoke, and bear it." He addresses this invitation to all Christians in general, but in particular to those who have embraced the religious life; for it regards both the one and the other differently. If He requires of Christians to take up His yoke, it is not in the rigor of the letter, but with regard to the precepts of His law; but what He requires of the religious regards the counsels and the most sublime perfection. Further, it is His will that we submit ourselves, of our own accord, to the yoke of the Lord; and in giving us the grace of a religious vocation, He did not say, "Receive my yoke which I impose on you," but "take it and put it on yourself." His glory does not consist in drawing us by violence after Him: His request is to reign in us by love, and not by force or by constraint. Is it thus that He reigns over me, and in me? Do I in effect desire to be guided hereafter only by Him, and according to Him? Do I desire it, I say, in effect?—for to this present time I have only desired it in appearance. In the past the desires of my heart have been my only guide, whom I have never had the courage to resist, but, on the contrary, have always sought to gratify. These are my natural inclinations, which I never could resolve to struggle with, and according to which I have always lived. These are my senses, which I have flattered and gratified, without ever contradicting or mortifying them in the smallest matters. These are the world, whose spirit I have not perhaps yet abandoned. These are my particular views, whether vain glory and ambition, or self-restraint and seeking my own will, which are all but too common in religion; and, although the objects therein be different, the

passions, notwithstanding, are the same. Behold the slavery in which I have passed a great part of my life ! Behold the masters whom I have obeyed ! And ought I to wonder that under such masters I have fallen into such deplorable mistakes ? Now, is it not time to make room for Jesus Christ, and to establish Him in my soul as in His kingdom, that He may possess it and rule therein ? Is there a better master ? Is there one wiser or more clear-sighted ? “ He is the very wisdom of God, and He has the words of eternal life.” What does He require of me but what is holy, but what is reasonable, but what is conformable to the strictest justice and equity, but what is useful and conducive to my future happiness ? But, above all, what does He require of me that He has not practised before me ? Would it not be an indignity for me to look upon it as too hard a condition that I should follow my Saviour, unite myself to Him, act with Him, and under Him ? Or that I should love what He has loved, and do what He has done ?

SECOND POINT.

I am the less permitted to exempt myself from this reign of Jesus Christ in me, in proportion to the solidity of its establishment and the excellence of its foundation. Christianity itself subjects us all to the yoke of this Man-God, our Legislator and our Master. To be a Christian, or, rather, to call ourselves Christians, and not to suffer ourselves to be guided by Jesus Christ—not to enter upon the road He has traced for us, nor to receive from Him the orders which ought to direct all our actions and regulate all our steps—is a contradiction. Why have we renounced the devil, the flesh, the world and its pomps, in our baptism ? Was it not to give us to understand that we should not be subject to their empire, nor enslave ourselves under so shameful a dominion ? Why were we marked at the same time with the seal and character of Jesus Christ ? Was it not that we might clothe ourselves with His livery, and acknowledge in the face of His altars that we belonged to Him, and that we were specially devoted to Him ? What is His Gospel ? Is it not His law ? And why have we

embraced this law if it is not to depend on the Sovereign Lord who imposed it on us? In fine, faith itself teaches us that we are the members of Jesus Christ, and that He is our Head; that we are His flock, and that He is our Pastor; that we are His Church, and that He is our Pontiff; that we are His people, His conquest, the price of His Blood, and that, having redeemed us with His Blood, He has acquired an indefeasible right over us. Were there no other than these common and general reasons to be taken into consideration, I never could, without injustice, depart from the inviolable attachment and the entire obedience I owe to this Divine Saviour. It is for Him to speak, and for me to listen with attention. Now, He really speaks and commands. The Gospel He preached to us subsists always—it is His Word, His precepts, and His ordinances. To refuse to conform to them would be a revolt, would be in some measure to renounce my baptism, and to fall into a kind of apostacy. It would be still more so on my part, since I am under a particular engagement, which binds me to Jesus Christ, and which gives Him a new right over my person—that is, the quality of a Religious. What have I done in consecrating myself to religion? I have loudly and singularly declared myself the disciple of Jesus Christ, His imitator in all, and His subject, ready to abandon all and to suffer all for His service. I have considered the religious state as a holy militia, wherein I enrolled myself to fight under the standard of Jesus Christ, and to act under His orders, as a soldier acts under those of his general. In whatever manner, then, He disposes of me: whether He raises or depresses me; whether He comforts or afflicts me; whether He destines me to this place or to another; whether, even with regard to the soul and the interior ways, He makes me walk in darkness or in the light, in pains and desolations, or in the abundance of celestial sweetness—to all this what else have I to say, if not that He is the Master, and that I am in His hands? Yes, He is the Master; He is mine, and I will have no other. I have chosen Him, or rather He has chosen me, and God forbid I should ever be detached from Him. If He has not heretofore had that place in my heart He ought to have had, I now surrender

it to Him entirely. My desire is that He may reign therein alone, and exercise in it all His power. I will, for the future, esteem nothing but as He esteems it, desire nothing but according to His inclinations, nor seek anything but what He has sought Himself. All that He despises I will, like Him, despise; and all that He condemns I will, like Him, condemn.

THIRD POINT.

The reign of Jesus Christ in a religious soul is not, as the world figures it, a heavy burden, nor a yoke hard to be borne. To believe appearances only, it seems to be a hard servitude; but he who tries it will find in it the most happy liberty, which is that of the children of God, and will enjoy therein an unalterable repose. Not but it is always a burden and a yoke; but it is the yoke of the Lord which we have embraced—it is His burden—and, according to the testimony He gives of it Himself, “His yoke is sweet and His burden is light.” This liberal Master, this bountiful Lord, has likewise promised us a double hundredfold—that is to say, a double felicity—the one present, and in this life; the other future, and for a blessed eternity. For it is thus He has explained Himself on this subject, in terms the most formal: “Whosoever shall have quitted all things for My sake—house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands—shall receive a hundredfold as much now in this world, and in the world to come life everlasting.” He does not only say that we shall receive this hundredfold after death, but that we shall receive it even in this life. The disengagement of the heart, being freed from all the cares of life; the testimony of a good conscience; interior peace; the sacred impressions of the Spirit of God, who communicates Himself to a religious soul, and replenishes it with a most pure and celestial joy: all this is far more valuable than all we have quitted in the world or could have possessed therein. I may judge of this by myself, who, how imperfect soever I may be, have had, from time to time, days of grace and fervor, in which, more faithful to my duties, and to all my observances, I lived more regularly,

and accomplished with more zeal and ardour the obligations of my state. Did I not then enjoy much more content? Did I find the yoke of Jesus Christ too fatiguing? On the contrary, did I not feel a certain sweetness in bearing it, which made me full amends for the violences I had to do myself? I esteemed myself happy, and so I was. But when did I cease to be so? It was when I relaxed, and when, suffering myself to be carried away by my natural weakness, I withdrew myself in some manner from the conduct and empire of the Master who governed me. My passions awoke; my inclinations gained the upper hand; I followed them, and have I not experienced a thousand times that it had been without comparison more sweet and more advantageous for me to have followed constantly the ways of my Saviour, and never to have strayed from the observance of the rule He has prescribed for me, nor from the examples He has given me? If, then, I would find again this hundredfold, or the happiness of the present life, which I have so often forfeited through my own fault, I ought to seek it in Jesus Christ—that is to say, I ought anew to devote myself to Jesus Christ; I ought to submit to Him all my faculties, all my views, all my works and actions; so that He may be, as it were, the soul of my soul, and that I may no longer live but by Him, and in Him—a life so much the more precious as it is a certain pledge of another life, and of another hundredfold, which is to be the eternal reward of it; for if Jesus Christ calls me to follow Him, and desires from this present time to reign in my heart, it is that He may make me one day reign with Him, and partake hereafter of His glory. The kings of the earth raise their favourites, and recompense the fidelity of their subjects, but not so far as to share their kingdoms with them: it is only in the service of this Lord of Lords, and this King of Heaven, that a crown is to be obtained—and a crown of immortality! Though I had nothing to hope for from Him in this life, would not this immortal crown be abundantly sufficient to requite me for all my services?

FOURTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On the Active Life of Jesus Christ.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you hear those words : “ He did all things well.”

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg grace to imitate the life of your Master and Model in your daily intercourse with others.

FIRST POINT.

After having passed thirty years in the obscurity of a retreat, Jesus Christ manifests Himself at length to the world, in order to preach His Gospel. This is what we call His active life. He had all sorts of persons to treat with, and among them He undoubtedly found sufficient matter to exercise the utmost extent of His charity ; for this virtue is more necessary than any other to converse with men, and no society can subsist without it. Now the charity of Jesus Christ, in the course of His active life, had chiefly three qualities, which ought to serve me as a model : His charity was *sweet*, *beneficent*, and *universal*. Such ought mine to be towards my neighbour, and, if it be deficient in any of these characters, it is no longer a Christian and religious charity. In the first place, then, the charity of Jesus Christ was *sweet*, and that sweetness appeared in His exterior manners, in His reserve, and His unalterable moderation. What had He not to endure from a gross and incredulous nation, to which He announced His divine truths ! With what condescension did He not manage so many people of opposite minds and tempers, and how did He not accommodate Himself to them, in order to persuade and attract them ! How many oppositions and contradictions did He not bear without making any complaint ? Who were His Apostles ? Poor fishermen, without education, without study, without knowledge or information. What did it not cost Him to form them ? They often did not compre-

hend what He said to them ; and, to make them understand Him the better, He repeated several times the same things, and explained them anew. They had frequent contests and disputes with each other, which He took care to settle and determine. He lived with them, notwithstanding the disgust which their behaviour might have given Him ; He communicated Himself to them, and was so far from appearing to be incommoded by their presence that He was desirous to have them continually about His person. Thus He might well say to us, what in effect He says in His Gospel, "Learn of Me how sweet and peaceful I am," and at the same time learn what you ought to be yourself. Have I learned this yet ? Have I learned to bear with the weaknesses of others ? They must necessarily bear with mine ; and is it not a great injustice to desire that they should make every allowance for me, and to put up with my infirmities on numberless occasions, and that I will not indulge or overlook anything in them ? Their bad qualities should serve to perfect and purify my charity, instead of weakening it ; for if I were only obliged to have charity and sweetness for such as are accomplished, and in whom there is no defect, all I should have would be of no merit ; or, rather, I would have none for any person whatsoever, since no one is faultless. Were I to live amongst angels, or amongst impeccable men, this sweet and patient charity would not be necessary for me, as I would then have no occasion to practise it ; but I am to live with persons who have their own particular ideas (and who is free from them ?), their own humours, their own caprices, prejudices, and errors. To undertake to change them is not my province, nor would I be able to accomplish it ; what I am, then, to do for the preservation of peace and the maintenance of charity is to accommodate myself to them as much as possible, and to win them by my sweetness. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth"—that is to say, they shall conciliate and gain everyone's heart. Am I of this number ? or, rather, have I not many reproaches to make myself on this head ? How often have I behaved with disdain and haughtiness towards my neighbour, instead of treating him with charitable indulgence ?

How many harsh expressions, rude and contemptuous jests and actions, have I not been guilty of, and am I not still guilty of? Oftentimes I do not even reflect on this, and I do not believe that he has the least cause to be offended with me. It would be much worse if, like some people, I valued and applauded myself for such proceedings. This is what often disturbs an entire community, creates divisions, and causes differences and disputes. A little more command of oneself would prevent all these evils ; and what is there that I ought not sacrifice in order to avoid and prevent them ?

SECOND POINT.

The same charity that made Jesus Christ bear with so much sweetness and patience the imperfections of those with whom He had to converse and to treat, made Him likewise employ His all-divine power to replenish them with His graces, for His was a beneficent charity. He went about doing good to all, casting out devils, comforting the afflicted, curing the sick, raising the dead to life, announcing the kingdom of God, and continually labouring for the salvation of souls. I am not able to work miracles in favour of my neighbour, as Jesus Christ did. It is not in my power, like this Divine Saviour, to restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, and health to paralytics and dying persons ; but in other respects each day affords me several opportunities, especially in a community, of rendering services, and obliging and assisting those around me. This is the practice of Christian charity, and, with much more reason, of religious charity. Have I all the zeal and all the ardour that is required on these occasions ? Am I not one of those indifferent souls who are only taken up with themselves, and who are unwilling to undergo the least trouble or pain in order to give pleasure to others. If by my duty I find myself under a particular obligation to assist them, and to supply their wants, how do I acquit myself ? Do I perform it with exactness ? Do I perform it willingly and with affection ? At least, am I charitable enough to wish them the good I cannot procure them ?

Am I sufficiently so to take a part in the success they meet with, and to rejoice at it? Am I sufficiently so to compassionate them on their misfortunes and share in their sorrows when they meet with any affliction or trouble? For charity obliges me to all this. But have I not a thousand times wounded charity, and do I not continue still to wound it in all these particulars? When there is question of myself, I feel but too much vivacity; and I carry the duties of charity very far when I require it to be exercised in my own behalf, and when I believe that I am refused it. I then prescribe no bounds to it, and am sensibly affected when I do not find it always disposed to serve me. Is it thus that I practise charity towards the persons to whom I owe it by so many titles? Everything seems troublesome and irksome to me when there is question of serving others. Instead of doing them all the good that is in my power, I envy them, perhaps, the benefits which are conferred on them by another, and would wish on certain occasions to throw some cross and obstacle in the way. Instead of preventing them, in things wherein no proper or personal duty engages me, with how much reluctance and difficulty have I granted them, perhaps in the discharge of my functions and employments, what my rule obliges me to grant them readily! Instead of interesting myself in their sufferings, and seeking to alleviate them, have I not, perhaps, conceived a malignant joy thereat, and have I not even been sometimes the cause of them? Jesus Christ has expressly assured us that we shall be treated by His Heavenly Father as we shall have treated our and His brethren. According to this measure, what would I have to hope for from God, and with what assurance could I pray to Him to pour on me the abundance of His graces, if my heart were always to remain as narrow and as closely shut up as it has hitherto been with regard to His members and His children.

THIRD POINT.

In what was the charity of Jesus Christ most admirable? It was in its extent, for it was an *universal charity*. As He had been sent by His Heavenly Father for all men, and as He loved them for His Father, He divided Himself equally amongst all, and bestowed His care on all, without any exception or respect of persons. Jews and Gentiles received from Him the same instructions and the same cures, as well in soul as in body. He was never seen to spurn or reject the misery and the poverty of the one, nor to be prepossessed in favour of the other, on account of their splendour or opulence. To those even who declared themselves the most openly, and with the most injustice against Him, He was disposed to do all the good they could expect; and they had only to have recourse to this Divine Master in order to obtain from Him all the graces of which He was the dispenser. He was not only disposed thereto, but He called them, He invited them, and even sought them for that purpose. If I do not extend my charity for my neighbour thus far, I have but an imperfect charity, or even I have but a false charity, because it is not a Christian charity; for Christian charity makes us love our neighbour in God and for God. Now, this motive has no limits; and to restrict it to certain subjects, without a will to extend it to others, is absolutely to destroy and annihilate it. Thus the Son of God, after Him the Apostles, recommending to us the practice of charity as one of our most essential obligations, have made use of one common term: "Love your brethren," "Love your neighbour." This quality of brother and of neighbour is no less suitable to one than to another, and, of consequence, it obliges no less to one than to another. If you do not do good, added the Saviour of the world, and if you are not prepared to do it, but to those who please you, but to those with whom you are linked in a more strict society, but to your friends—how do you differ from the pagans? For, like you, they have their acquaintances, their friendships, and their alliances. Now, evangelical charity must have a character of distinction and of sanctity, to raise it above a charity or love that is purely

human, such as was that of paganism, and such as is still that of the world. It is for this reason that the Saviour of mankind, in the commandment which He gives us to love one another, and which He calls His own favourite precept and His own law, comprehends even those who turn against us, and from whom we have received the most sensible offences. "Love your enemies, do good to those that hate you, bless those that curse you, and pray for those that slander you." How eminent, but how rare, is this degree of charity ! Notwithstanding, eminent and rare as it is, it is a necessary duty ; and Christianity, and consequently religion, acknowledges no other true charity, neither does God recompense any other. What is my case then, and how have I fulfilled this obligation ? For what Jesus Christ Himself has announced to us, that "the times were to come in which the charity of many should grow cold," is not only accomplished among the people of the world, but even among religious. In reality it is growing but too cold ; and in proportion as it grows cold it becomes contracted. We have our inclinations and our antipathies, and according to this difference of sentiments our conduct differs. We have our particular friends, for whom we spare nothing ; and we scarcely ever interest ourselves in what regards others. We have our predilections in an office wherein we owe the same care and attention to each individual ; and whilst we bestow a special attention and an extraordinary vigilance in our regard for some, we behave with negligence and extreme difficulty towards others. If offended at anything our hearts fill with resentments ; and instead of stifling them, as in charity we are bound, we know how to manifest them, and how to make a return when an opportunity presents itself. What is still very common, and overthrows the whole order of charity, we show ourselves full of sweetness and full of zeal to strangers and to all persons out of the community ; whilst we entertain a coolness, and sometimes a bitterness, for our brethren, with whom we are, notwithstanding, united by such intimate and such sacred ties. Where is, then, the charity of Jesus Christ ?—for this is not it : it is only to be found in certain souls, whose examples God sets before our eyes for our edification. Have I not

seen, and do I not continually see, some of them? They seem to me as if they were charity itself; or it seems that their charity displays itself incessantly, and that it multiplies in proportion as occasions for exercising it offer. They are admired, but are there many who imitate them? To what purpose, then, do I admire their virtue, if I do not labour to imitate it?

FOURTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On the Abuse of Grace.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you hear the Apostle addressing to you those words: “We exhort you not to receive in vain the grace of God.”

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg grace to profit well of this retreat, and to lay now a sure foundation for future sanctity.

FIRST POINT.

It is an article of faith that God will call me to an account for all the graces which I have received, and which I continually receive from Him; for these graces are talents He entrusts to me, and which He would have me improve to my advantage. They are not graces without return, but funds of obligation which I contract with God; and this is to be understood of all sorts of graces, of what nature soever they may be. It is likewise an article of faith that the more of them I receive the greater account I shall have to render; for each grace, by the use I am obliged to make of it, ought to fructify in me, and render to God a degree of glory. “You have given me five talents,” said the good servant to his master; “behold five others that I have gained and added to them.” Hence it follows that the more God favours me with His graces the more humble and fervent I ought to be in His service. *Humble*, because I received them, and am answerable to God for them; for

can we glory in a good which is not our own, and for which we are accountable? *Fervent*, because it is by this means only that I can clear myself before God of the immense debt with which I am charged, in consequence of the infinite favours that He has conferred upon me. Now, it is evident that, in quality of a religious person, I have received of God more graces, more abundant and more particular graces, than Christians of the world. I should be the most blind and the most ungrateful of beings did I not acknowledge it. It is, then, true that I am much more indebted to God than worldlings, and that He expects much more from me. I tremble sometimes for those in the world on whom God bestows great fortunes, and whom He raises to great honours. Alas! I ought rather to tremble for myself, after so many blessings (not temporal, but spiritual, and of greater worth) that God has bestowed on me, and which I must account for at the day of judgment. Why did Jesus Christ weep over Jerusalem? It was not for the torments He was there going to endure, but for the many graces which that unfaithful city and nation had received and abused. This is what touched Him with compassion, because He foresaw the calamities and misfortunes that would attend the abuse of those graces. Have I not given Him yet more reason to shed tears over me? The reprobates in hell will eternally lament the graces which they shall have lost; they will eternally wish it were in their power to repair that loss, and their despair will arise from the thought of its being now irreparable. Their example ought to instruct me, and even their despair serve to reanimate my hope. Whilst, by the good use of present graces, I may repair the abuse of the past, my hope, supported by my penance, must be my resource with God.

SECOND POINT.

There are different kinds of graces—exterior and interior. Without speaking of the gifts of nature, the exterior graces are the means of salvation that God furnishes us with. Of these means I have never been deprived; or, to express myself better, God has superabundantly provided me with

them in the religious state. But what benefits have I derived from them? What use have I made of so many prayers, so many lectures, so many confessions, so many communions, so many instructions, exhortations, and good examples? I have abused them all, and God will reproach me with that abuse. I have abused them in rendering them all unprofitable to me, and in making them all a matter of sin. This is what I cannot sufficiently deplore in the presence of God and in the bitterness of my soul. Yes, God will reproach me with the ill-use I have made of so many means, which were the most excellent and the most proper to effect my sanctification. "Let it be cut down," says the Master in the Gospel, speaking of the unfruitful fig-tree, "and let it be torn up: why does it unprofitably occupy the ground?" Am I not this fig-tree? I fill in vain a place that would be much better occupied by a faithful soul. In reality all these means of salvation and perfection have sanctified millions of religious souls; and, though I have had it in my power to make a proper use of them, yet they have not rendered me more exact, more vigilant, more mortified, or more disengaged from the world and from myself. These means would have converted whole nations of idolaters, and they have not corrected in me one single fault, nor made me acquire one single virtue. "Woe to thee, Corozain; because if the miracles had been done in Tyre and Sidon that have been wrought in thee, they had long since done penance in sackcloth and ashes." This malediction regards me, and the application of it is very natural and just. God will not only reproach me with the inutility of these salutary means, but with the formal abuse I have made of them, when, through my fault, they even became matter for sin; for these means, so frequent in my holy state, cannot be indifferent means: from the moment they become unprofitable to me, I become more culpable and more guilty. According to this rule, what a treasure of wrath have I amassed against myself! And should I not fear lest I may sink under the weight of it, if I be not careful to diminish it? Alas! far from diminishing it, I but increase it every day.

THIRD POINT.

Besides the exterior graces, there are interior; and the Holy Ghost operates these interior graces in me in order to make known to me the ways of God, and induce me to love them: so many lights with which He enlightens me, so many sights which He gives me of my duties, so many good desires, so many remorse of conscience, so many motions by which He presses me to pursue another line of conduct, and to lead a more religious and fervent life. In resisting all these graces what have I done? According to the language of the Apostle St. Paul, I have resisted the Holy Ghost Himself, who is the Spirit of Grace; I have outraged Him; I have trodden under my feet the Blood of Jesus Christ; I have annihilated, with regard to myself, the merits of His Cross, by which the smallest grace has been purchased. This is an abuse which God punishes even in this life, by a subtraction of these very graces: I neglect them, and He withdraws them from me; I despise them, and He takes them from me. Is He not in that case, as in all other things, sovereignly equitable? A chastisement without mercy! since this subtraction of grace is a pure evil, without any mixture of good. A chastisement that I have, perhaps, already experienced, and still continue to experience! For is not this the cause that I have no longer certain sentiments of God that I had heretofore, and that my conscience no longer makes me certain reproaches that it heretofore made me? I am in a visible state of relaxation, and, notwithstanding, I live therein in peace and tranquillity—a peace much worse than the greatest troubles. But it is a chastisement to which we are above all things exposed by the abuse of certain graces of election, which, in the order of salvation and the sanctification of the soul, are as a kind of crisis, like that which happens in the order of nature and in the diseases of the body. For there are days of particular benediction on the part of God, such as may be for me those days of my retreat. To abuse these sorts of graces is most dangerous, and may be attended with the most deplorable consequences. St. Augustine, and numberless others like him, would have been lost had they not

profited of the moments unto which, by a singular providence, God had affixed the grace of their conversion. And how many religious have fallen into most grievous disorders for not having answered God when He called them, and when He solicited them to resume the care of their perfection, which they had abandoned?

FOURTH DAY.

FIRST LECTURE.

On Mortification.

As to exterior mortification, it is evident that the Creator has impressed the most sensible image thereof on the material things which surround us, and that the vocation of entire nature is to suffer. We press the earth which sustains us with the entire weight of our body, and we lacerate its bosom, to insert therein the plants and fruits destined for our preservation. Before the harvest covers our plains the grain has undergone a kind of death. Hard labour has been devoted to the production of the bread which nourishes and the wine which invigorates us. The materials of our clothing have undergone several preparations, and groaned, as it were, beneath the hands of industry. The flesh of animals is daily immolated for our necessities. The hammer and the chisel have disposed and fashioned the materials which compose our edifices. In fine, the universe is a temple, the earth a great and vast altar, on which entire nature sacrifices to its Author. After having considered the external objects which surround us, let us look to ourselves, and what shall we find in man which does not proclaim his obligation to suffer? He suffers from infancy, announcing his early pains by his tears and cries. He suffers in childhood from the restraints attendant on his education, from necessary subjection to his masters. He suffers in youth and in all ages, condemned as he is to labour, to sorrow, and to the many trials inseparable from his human condition. In a word, as man, as heir to the

crime of his ancestors, he must suffer. As a Christian he must suffer; mortification, taken strictly in the Gospel sense, obliges him to subdue his body, and to bear his cross in company with a crucified God. But if man is destined to suffer—if mortification is not only a duty imposed on every Christian, but the great and necessary mark of conformity between Christ and His disciples—religious souls have contracted a particular obligation to embrace the practice of this virtue. The cloister is to them a Calvary, and they ought to be able to say with the Apostle, that “with Christ they are nailed to the Cross.” Resemblance to this Divine model is the character of the elect. The saints understood this truth, and they were, therefore, one and all, mortified. All, in different degrees, loved and practised mortification. They were persuaded that a disciple of Jesus Christ, to be worthy of this name, should be marked with the seal of penance—should express and manifest in his person the suffering and crucified life of his Master, “that the life also of Jesus Christ may be made manifest in our bodies.” Jesus Christ has embraced the Cross through choice, through love; can He discover His image in those who gratify their senses? “They who are in the flesh cannot please God.” How many times has the body been to us an instrument of sin? How many graces have we lost through its agency? The devil is our enemy; but he would prove only a weak one if not supported by the flesh. Remember that the body and soul move together on our journey to eternity; the body, if unsubdued and unchecked, will infallibly drag the spirit into the precipice of perdition. By penance the Christian subdues the rebellion of the flesh, weakens the power of the tempter, and becomes susceptible of the purest impressions of grace. A fire quickly communicates itself to wood; so the flame of Divine love speedily acts on a soul which has retrenched the inordinate desires of the flesh by mortification. The practice of mortification should extend to the eyes, to words, to repasts, and, in one sense, even to recreation. First, with regard to mortification of the eyes. Death enters by the senses, and especially by that of sight. Exterior objects, transmitted by this organ, strike on the soul, distract it,

interrupt its recollection, and often pervert and corrupt it. Be careful to keep this sense within the bounds of exact modesty. Let the angels, adorers of the Eternal Majesty, read in your eyes the circumspection, the purity which become the virgin, and that profound respect with which they are themselves penetrated at the foot of the throne of the Lamb. The more you close your eyes to perishable objects the more will the attention of the Lord be fixed on you. You will become the object of that complacency with which He honours pure souls desirous of pleasing Him; of that protection with which He favours His spouses, with a view to attract them more fully to His service; of that tenderness which abundantly recompenses them for the sacrifices which their modesty and purity make to Him. Then will He grant you those special graces of sanctification which augment virtue and peace, the fruit thereof. The mortification of the tongue ensures the rigorous observance of silence. You should be induced to speak only by one of three motives—necessity, utility, or charity. Guided by these principles, what useless and superfluous conversations will be suppressed!—what levity and indiscretion avoided!—what detraction retrenched! Mortification at meals represses eagerness and avidity. Before partaking of material food, it would be well to say interiorly, “Not on bread alone doth man live.” We can render this action supernatural by a glance towards the Author of all good; by the remembrance of the Man-God, conversing and eating with His Apostles; by a pious attention to the lecture which nourishes the soul. We can make from time to time some sacrifice, either in the quantity or quality of our food. A little retrenchment does no injury, and we give to the soul what we take from the body. Mortification is necessary to a certain degree even at recreation. Liberty of spirit, modesty, gaiety, and religious affability are certainly allowable; but no dissipation, no amusement that degenerates into puerility, no loud laughter, boisterous mirth, unbecoming jests, &c. “Let your modesty be known to all men.” “The Lord is nigh,” and His eyes observe you. He has assured us Himself “that every idle word men shall speak they shall render an account for it in the day of judg-

ment." To those who have the spirit of mortification recreation affords many opportunities of sacrifice. One will restrain a feeling of impatience, of vivacity; another will suppress an observation suggested by vanity and the desire of applause, or perhaps a lively but cutting repartee. One is silent to check the natural ardour which wishes to speak too much; another speaks to conquer the humour which would prefer to indulge itself in silence. One refrains from displaying those talents which would secure her an ascendancy over others; another makes use of her wit only to avoid displeasing her sisters, and to learn how to bear what annoys her. She mingles in society and joins in conversation, not to shine, but to add to the happiness of those around her. She is the more affable and prepossessing, as, while she sees the weaknesses of others, she does not forget her own. In conforming to the difficulties and austerities of the rule, the irksomeness of your observances and duties, and the privations of your state; in cheerfully submitting to the violence which must be offered to nature and the senses—in all these sacrifices you find opportunities of practising mortification and penance. In a word, one aiming to be the Spouse of Jesus Christ ought to watch over herself, that she may not be surprised by that carnal prudence which is the death of the soul. If for particular reasons some mitigations are allowed her, she will supply by mortification of the heart for what is wanting in corporal austerities; she will humble herself before God, and, confining herself to the indulgences granted, she will refrain from going beyond them, or listening to the insatiable claims of nature. The care of her body will be reasonable, but not sensual. She will always acknowledge the sovereignty of the spirit over the flesh; and, as St. Bernard said, she will dread to kill the mistress by sparing the servant. These reflections are peculiarly necessary in that state of infirmity which, by requiring attention for the body, often injures the spirit of fervor and regularity. An infirm religious may by immortification lose the merit of her actual condition. She ought to fear lest the exterior man may be renewed at the expense of the interior, and her soul become more debilitated than her body. She may and ought to

avoid useless conversations, dissipation, and levity; she may and ought to keep silence as much as circumstances permit; she should practise recollection, never interfering with such of her sisters as aim at peculiar exactness to this point of the rule; she should unite herself occasionally to her good Master by holy thoughts, pious aspirations, and an interior view of the Cross, which awakens fervor, and nourishes piety and love. She ought to be on her guard against that tenderness for self which too eagerly desires or demands indulgences and conveniences; adheres to comforts through a spirit of propriety or effeminacy; leads certain sisters to complain of the negligence or inattention of infirmarians when they are the first to occupy, to fatigue them. Such dissatisfied characters are always ready to observe a deficiency of zeal or charity in others, whereas they might themselves be more reasonably reproached with too much impatience and delicacy. In fine, an infirm sister whose soul should be dearer to her than her body, and who recalls the maxim of the Saviour, that "he that will save his life shall lose it," ought to endure in a spirit of renunciation and penance the contradictions of her will, resulting from the delay of some attention she requires, from a privation, a mortification which God permits, to remind her that, as she is aiming to be the spouse of a crucified God, she ought to be His imitator and His victim. But however useful, however advantageous, exterior mortification may be, it is particularly from interior mortification that it derives its merit. Mortification of the mind and heart should produce those divisions of the spirit of which the Apostle speaks, and which are necessary to its purification: it should reform the heart, destroying the old man and creating the new. Mortification is to us what the hand of the sculptor is to the stone: he cuts, hews, and pares away, to transform the shapeless block into a beautiful statue.

FIFTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the Agony in the Garden.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Let us represent to ourselves the Garden of Olives; the pale light of the moon penetrating through the foliage of the trees; the weather calm and serene, but somewhat cold.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Ask light to see and grace to detest your sins, which caused so much anguish to your sweet Saviour.

FIRST POINT.

To understand what were the interior sufferings of Jesus in the Garden of Olives, we must understand to what an extent He hated sin. Let us consider Him prostrate in the presence of His Father; while all the iniquities of the world, since the crime of Cain to the last sin that will ever be committed on the earth, present themselves before Him with all their malice and enormity. He beholds the murders, the sins against purity, the sacrileges—in a word, all the crimes of the greatest sinners. He sees also the infidelities of chosen souls, their resistance to grace, their cowardice in His service. He sees my sins also. He distinguishes them all, and each one of them contributes to make Him suffer. He beholds at the same time all the torments He must endure to expiate our misdeeds—the whips, the thorns, the nails, the Cross. All the ignominies of His Passion vividly affect His imagination—He seems already to be suffering from their torments. His human nature is terrified, and sinks to the ground in agony. Lord, can I be insensible to the fearful sorrow which weighs down Thy soul! Ah! since my sins have reduced Thee to this state, grant that I may detest them with all my heart, and may I rather die a thousand times than wilfully relapse into them any more.

SECOND POINT.

Jesus casts a look through the course of all ages: the years that have already passed and those yet to come pass in succession before His eyes. His divine intelligence distinguishes in them the birth, the life and death, and eternal destiny of every individual. He beholds among them, it is true, some who will apply to themselves the fruits of His Precious Blood; but He sees that the greater number will despise His proffered love, and lose themselves, despite all He will have done to save them. He sees those souls for whom He is going to die precipitate themselves in crowds into the eternal abysses of hell. This foresight is to Him infinitely more insupportable than all the torments which await Him; it causes Him to cry out, "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me." Behold to what an excess my Saviour has loved my soul, and the souls of all mankind! I ought, then, to avoid with the greatest care everything that would be likely to hinder my salvation, and labour to the utmost of my power to prevent the loss of my neighbour's soul.

THIRD POINT.

Jesus, overwhelmed with sorrow, perseveres for three long hours in His painful prayer, and ceases not to repeat the same words, "My Father, if it be possible, remove this chalice from me: nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done." Is it with the same dispositions, and, above all, with the same perseverance, that I have recourse to God in my troubles? Let us consider, further, the humility of this divine Saviour, who remains prostrate in the presence of His Father, and submits to be comforted by an angel—He who is the Lord of Angels and the source of all strength! In fine, He accepts the chalice which is presented to Him, and consents to suffer the torments of death. When the hand of the Lord weighs me down, and when, after having humbly begged to be delivered from my troubles, I do not experience the effect of my petition, I ought to submit to His holy will with love and resignation. O my Saviour! grant me grace to follow Thy example, and in all my sufferings to unite myself to Thy divine and perfect submission.

FIFTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.

The Carrying of the Cross.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Let us represent to ourselves the streets of Jerusalem, and, outside the town, the road to Calvary ; it is rugged and uneven.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg for grace to embrace whatever crosses it may please Divine Providence to send you with a generous spirit.

FIRST POINT.

Consider Jesus, our Divine Master, dragging Himself along ; He has no strength, and the enormous weight of the Cross overwhelms Him. Too often we only behold in sufferings a cause for sadness and a real misfortune ; this is because we are too much accustomed to judge of things according to human views. Oh, how different would our thoughts be if we were to call in to our aid the pure light of faith ! We should then see that those misfortunes we dread are afflicting to nature alone, but that grace and the spirit find in them their nourishment and their life. We should come to understand that the Cross purifies us from our imperfections, satisfies the justice of God for our sins, enriches us with abundant merits, unites us with Jesus in this life, and prepares us to be eternally united with Him in heaven. O my dear Saviour, what inestimable advantages are these ! How can the pain attached to suffering be compared to the happiness of growing in Thy love, and of becoming united so intimately to Thee ! Jesus, the Treasure of faithful hearts, Sovereign Good of those souls to whom Thou hast given to experience how sweet Thou art ! ought I to dread those passing sufferings, which the unction of Thy grace sweetens, when I know that by accepting them willingly I become more closely united to Thee by such sacred bonds ? Ah ! do not permit this. Uphold my weakness. I accept from my heart at this moment all the crosses it

shall please Thee to send me. I receive them from Thy hand as a pledge of Thy love, and I desire to carry them to the latest moment of my life.

SECOND POINT.

Consider Jesus advancing slowly and painfully; each effort causes His Divine Blood to flow anew. He is treated with the greatest cruelty. He meekly follows those who are leading Him to death. Soon His strength is exhausted, and He falls under the weight of the Cross. He rises again, goes on again, and falls again. They overwhelm Him with blows, and have less compassion for Him than for a beast of burden. And in the midst of this disgraceful treatment He is without bitterness towards those who make Him suffer. Our Divine Saviour, whose goodness is infinite, allots to each of us the crosses which ought to sanctify us. He selects them in accordance with our wants, proportions them to our strength, and never imposes them on us without giving us at the same time the grace necessary to bear them well. He afflicts some by corporeal sufferings; others by the loss of their goods or their friends; others, again, by interior trials, or by a succession of mere trifling contradictions, often more difficult to bear than great troubles. His designs over all are full of love; He wishes to make all participate in the merits of His sacrifice. O Jesus! never permit me to ignore Thy Divine Hand, when it shall deign to weigh heavily upon me. O my Lord! Thou hast two ways of visiting us: by joy and by affliction. The first tends to soften the pain of our exile, and to lighten our labours; but the second is far more precious: it advances us towards our end; and, if it were possible for such weak creatures as we are to suffer always without consolation, we ought to desire it. O my Saviour, is this disposition to be found in my soul? Thou knowest. Yet, however great my misery may be, I place myself in Thy Divine Hands. Give me, as Thou seest best, consolation or the Cross: I accept all, and abandon myself to Thy good pleasure. All I ask of Thee is Thy grace and Thy love; if Thou givest me these, I shall be rich enough, and I desire nothing more.

THIRD POINT.

Consider what heartrending affliction the tender and sensitive Heart of Jesus must have experienced when He saw His Blessed Mother join the crowd, and follow His steps to the place of execution. The extreme grief of this afflicted Mother, far from bringing any relief to His sufferings, only served to aggravate them. Mary grieved to see Jesus suffer, and Jesus suffered to behold Mary's grief; and thus, by a communication of grief and love, these two Hearts, so closely united together, endured beforehand all the tortures of the crucifixion. O incomprehensible suffering, of which the most afflicted hearts can scarcely form the smallest conception! Every noble, sensitive, and generous sentiment in the Hearts of the Son and of the Mother coöperated together at this moment to inflict on them the most cruel martyrdom. Shall I remain insensible to their pains? These sorrowful mysteries are accomplished for me; shall I refuse my love to a Saviour and a Mother who have sacrificed for me their dearest affections? O Mary, my Blessed Mother, obtain for me a firmness like thine, together with a courage that no trial may be able to shake. But, above all, obtain for me an ardent love for Jesus, and the grace to unite all my sorrows and afflictions to His bitter Passion.

FIFTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.
On the Crucifixion.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Represent to yourself the top of Mount Calvary, and there behold the fatal spot dug out to receive the foot of the Cross.

SECOND PRELUDE.—O' Jesus, Victim of Love! permit me to accompany Thee in Thy sacrifice, and communicate to my heart the sentiments that animate Thine.

FIRST POINT.

Jesus reaches the top of Mount Calvary. Arrived at the summit of the mountain of His sacrifice, Jesus casts a glance on the objects around: the Cross, the nails, the executioners—all are ready. He also sees the place ready dug to receive the Cross. The frightful apparatus of His execution causes Him no terror, yet His adorable Heart is cruelly oppressed; a thought more grievous than death has taken possession of it. He foresees the inutility of His Blood for a prodigious number of souls who will not profit by His redemption; He sees through the course of ages, whose secrets His divine foreknowledge penetrates, these souls, dearer to Him a thousand times than His own life, falling in crowds into the eternal pit, as the leaves are carried away by the autumn wind. At this sight His strength fails Him, He falls prostrate on the ground, and suffers the most inconceivable of martyrdoms. O my Saviour, why cannot I become consumed with zeal for the salvation of souls on beholding to what an extent Thou dost love them! Communicate to my heart, O my Sovereign Good, the zeal with which Thine is consumed, and give me a holy industry to employ every means, and a great courage not to be repelled by anything, when there is question of snatching a soul from hell.

SECOND POINT.

Jesus is stripped of His garments. All the torments of His scourging are renewed at this moment. His crown of thorns is also roughly removed; His Blood flows from all parts; His sufferings are incomprehensible. He, nevertheless, advances with meekness towards the Cross, which is extended along the ground. He lies down, and stretches Himself upon it. He offers His Divine Hand to the executioner, who is about to pierce it. The latter, rudely seizing it, fixes an enormous nail in it. Then the blows of the hammer redouble—those fatal blows which re-echo within the heart of Mary! O dreadful and agonizing torment! O Jesus and Mary, what tortures Thou endurest for my sake! Shall I have the courage to contemplate this awful

scene to the end? Jesus, the adorable Jesus, whose meekness cannot be shaken any more than His love can, now presents the other hand. It is dragged with violence, then pierced with a nail like the first. His divine feet are also nailed to the cross. The latter is raised on high, after being horribly jolted, and then it is let to fall with all its weight into the hole prepared to receive it on the rock. O Mary! how was it that thou didst not expire in that dreadful moment? Ah, our Lord prolonged thy life in order to prolong thy martyrdom! Mother of sorrow and of love, thou also must drink to the dregs thy chalice of bitterness! Never permit me, O Mother of Sorrows, to refuse to suffer, since by my sins I have caused the torments of Jesus, as well as thy own incomprehensible sufferings.

THIRD POINT.

When a man is about to die, those who have loved him during life, or who have received benefits from him, unite together in order to give him, on the brink of the grave, that last of consolations, the seeing that they compassionate his sufferings and regret and weep over his loss. But a like consolation was not awarded to the tender Heart of Jesus. Let us cast our eyes on the Cross, the cruel bed on which He is soon to yield His last sigh: it is surrounded by His enemies; the chief priests and ancients of the people, all those who are the most dignified, and who are respected as the oracles of the nation, rejoice at His ignominious fate; they make a diversion of the horrible scene of His sufferings and death. The multitude, who but a few days before had received Him in such triumph, now mock at His ignominious end; and *all*, even those whom He had overwhelmed with His benefits and fed in a miraculous manner, have either abandoned Him or joined themselves with His persecutors. Where are the Apostles, who that very night had made Him such noble protestations? They have been cowardly enough to conceal themselves, for fear of risking their lives if they came forward to soothe the last moments and receive the last words of their Pastor and

Father. Only one from amongst them, John, is standing beside Mary ; two or three holy women are also there. These are all the faithful friends remaining to Jesus. O Heart of my Saviour ! could I imitate the ingratitude of those who abandoned Thee in those trying moments—could I ever belie or dissemble my feelings when Thy enemies let loose their fury against Thy holy religion or sacred person ? No, Lord, this shall never be ; whatever it may cost me, I will brave the fear of men, and will be faithful to Thee, even at the expense of my life.

FIFTH DAY.

FIRST LECTURE.

On the Passion.

We should naturally expect to find that, as the work of our redemption was principally achieved through the mysteries of our Blessed Lord's Passion, He should desire those mysteries to be especially in our remembrance, and should allow them to prevail with His Sacred Heart over all others, when offered to Him in love, thanksgiving, or intercession. St. Bernard declares that the mere thought of Our Lord's Passion is a spiritual communion. Father Balthazar Alvarez not only made it the ordinary subject of his meditations, but he used to say to his novices, "We must not think we have done anything until we have reached this point, that we never in our hearts forget Christ crucified." Our Lord Himself said to St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, "If every Friday you will pay attention to the hour at which I expired upon the Cross, you will at once receive particular graces from My Spirit, which I then returned to the Eternal Father ; and although you do not feel this grace, it shall always rest upon you." Our Lord said to the Blessed Veronica, the Augustinianess, "I wish all men to do their best to sorrow in their hearts through veneration for My Passion, as if compassionating Me. If they shed one little tear over it, they may be sure they have

done a great thing ; for the tongue of man cannot tell what joy and satisfaction that one little tear causes Me." The Angels revealed to the Blessed Joanna of the Cross that the Divine Majesty took such complacency in sorrow for the Passion of Christ, and that such sorrow was so grateful a sacrifice that it was reckoned equal to the shedding of our blood or the endurance of great afflictions. Our Lord said to St. Gertrude, " Every one, even though he should feel himself weighed to the ground with great sins, may breathe freely with the hope of pardon, if he will only offer to God the Father My most innocent Passion and Death. Let him be sure that by this he shall receive the saving fruit of indulgence ; for there is no remedy on earth so efficacious against sin as a devout recollection of My Passion, joined with a true repentance and a right faith." The Blessed Albertus Magnus used to say that a single tear shed over our Lord's Passion was better than a year's fast on bread and water, with watchings and disciplines. St. Mary Magdalene revealed to a certain holy Dominican that when she retired into the wilderness to do penance, after our Lord's Ascension, she desired to know from Jesus how she was to occupy herself, and our Lord sent St. Michael to her with a most beautiful cross, which he planted at the door of her cell, that she might spend her days in incessant meditations on the Passion. Once, when St. Gertrude was meditating on the Passion, she understood by a light from heaven that to ruminate on the sufferings of Christ is an exercise of infinitely greater efficacy than all others. Lastly, St. Augustine says, " What kindles, urges, inflames, and drives me to love Thee more than anything else, is the most ignominious and bitter death which Thou, O good Jesus, didst endure for the work of our redemption. This alone, this altogether, easily claims for itself all our life, all our labour, all our devotion, and, finally, all our love, This, I say, best excites, most sweetly solicits, most amply multiplies our devotion." With what exquisite artifices of love our Lord can repay this devotion is most beautifully shown in the life of St. Gertrude. One Friday, when it was now near evening, she cast her eyes upon a crucifix, and, moved with compunction, she cried out, " Ah, my sweetest Creator and

Lover! what and how great things didst Thou bear for my salvation to-day? And I, oh! so unfaithful! have made no account of them, and the day has gone by while I have been occupied with other things. Alas! I have not devoutly called to mind, hour after hour, that 'Thou, dear life, that giveth life to all, for the love of my love hast died!' The Lord from a crucifix answered her, "What you neglected I have supplied for you; for every hour I gathered into my Heart what you ought to have collected in yours, and this has made My Heart swell with such an excessive fulness that I have waited for this hour with great desire that this intention might be made to me on your part. And now, with this intention which you have just made, I will offer to God My Father all that I through the day have supplied for you, because without your own intention it could not be so salutary for you." "In this we may remark," says St. Gertrude, "the most faithful love of Jesus for man, which, solely on account of that intention by which He grieves over what he has neglected, amends it with God the Father, and supplies for a deficiency in such a most lofty way." Once, also, when the Saint was handling a crucifix very devoutly, she understood by a supernatural light that when anyone looked with devotion on a crucifix he was looked upon by God with such benignant mercy that his soul, like a shining mirror, received into itself from divine love such an exceedingly delectable image that all the heavenly hosts are delighted with it; and for as often as he shall have done this on earth, he shall have these images for so many increases of eternal glory in heaven. Neither is this a mere devotion of feeling. "Ah," said St. Gertrude once, "Ah! my only hope, and the salvation of my soul! tell me how I can do Thee at least a little good, then, for this Thy Passion, to Thee so bitter, to me so salutary." This was our Lord's answer: "When a man follows another's interests in preference to his own, he repays Me the captivity which I endured in the morning, when I was taken, pinioned, and grievously tormented for men's salvation. When he humbly acknowledges himself to be in fault about anything, he recompenses Me for the judgment which I underwent at the first hour, when I was accused by false witnesses and sen-

tenced to death. When he refrains his senses from things which delight him, he repays Me for the scourging which I endured the third hour. When he obeys an ill-natured superior, he relieves the pain of my crown of thorns. When he is the injured party, but asks pardon first, he compensates for My carrying of the Cross. When he almost goes beyond what he can do in extending charity to others, he repays Me for that extension which I so sharply endured when distended on the Cross at the sixth hour. When, to hinder a sin, he does not mind sorrow or reproach, he repays Me for My death, which I suffered for the salvation of the world at the ninth hour. When he is reproached and answers humbly, he, as it were, takes Me down from the Cross. When he prefers his neighbour to himself, and thinks him more worthy of honour, or any other good thing than himself, he repays Me for my burial." On another occasion a similar revelation was made to the same saint. She said to our Lord, "Ah, Lord! tell me how I can laudably venerate Thy Passion." He replied, "By more frequently revolving in your mind that anxiety by which I, your Creator and Lord, when in My agony, prayed the more intensely, and through the excessive vehemence of My solicitude, desire, and love, I moistened the ground with My bloody sweat. Then you must commend to Me all you do, and all that has to be done about you, in union with that subjection wherewith I, for the same reason, said to the Father, 'Not My will, but Thine, be done.' So you must receive all prosperous or adverse things with the same love with which I send them all to you for your salvation. You must receive prosperity with gratitude, in union with that love by which I am your Lover, and condescending to your frailty. I procure them for you, that by them you may learn to hope for eternal prosperity. You must receive adversity in union with that love with which, out of the affection of My paternal fidelity, I send it to you, that by it you may earn for yourself an everlasting good." Now, what do all these examples show, except that our Lord has been pleased to give us over His Passion, as if it were really more utterly and completely our own, to do with it what we will, than the pains we ourselves suffer, or the afflictions we have

to bear, which are rather debts we have to pay, necessities from which we cannot escape, or punishments we must endure? But to come to the use of the Passion or intercession. Lancisius tells us, "That the offering of the Blood of Christ, or of His Passion and Death, to the Eternal Father, or to Christ Himself, in order to appease Him for the sins of the world, is of boundless efficacy." This practice was taught by God to St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi when He vouchsafed to complain to her that there were so few in the world who made any effort to appease His anger against sinners. In consequence of this, many times in the day she offered up the Blood of Christ for sinners of all classes, and her ordinary practice was daily to offer it fifty times for the living and the dead. She did this with so much fervour that God repeatedly showed her multitudes of souls whose conversion she had thus obtained, as well as multitudes released from purgatory. Once, in a rapture, she cried out, "As often as the creature offers this Blood, by which it is redeemed, it offers a gift which has no price whereby it can be paid back." Nay, the gift is so great that the Eternal Father reckons Himself under obligation to His creature; for He sees it in its misery, which His infinite goodness desires to compassionate, and compassionating to communicate Himself to it; and thus this offering is the cause of His communicating now, and for ever continuing to communicate, His goodness to His creatures." "This devotion," says Lancisius, "glorifies and recreates God with the most excellent and noble of all offerings. It asks, or rather, in a certain sense, exacts, for our past sins remission, preservation from sin in time to come, the conversion of sinners and heretics, and freedom from the temporal pains due to sin. It awaits, also, as a thanksgiving for all public and personal blessings, and is efficacious for the impetration of the Divine assistance, and for the relief of the numberless necessities, both of the living and the dead."

SIXTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the Presence of God.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you hear addressed to you the words, “Walk in My presence and be perfect.”

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg grace to be ever attentive to the presence of God.

FIRST POINT.

God is in all places: I then owe Him respect in all places; I ought in all places to remember the pre-eminence of His Being, and my dependence. In reality, there is no place in the universe which is not consecrated by the presence of the majesty of God; and, in whatsoever place I am, I may say with Jacob, “This place is holy, and I did not know it.” or, rather, I did not think of it—God is here, and I forgot it: I did not reflect on it. Thus, the exercise of the presence of God is the legitimate homage and worship which I render to the immensity of God. St. Augustine figured it to himself as a vast ocean, in which all creatures, to use his expression, are swallowed up, and penetrated with the essence of God, without ever being able to come out of Him, or to disengage themselves from Him, because they are present to Him by the necessity of their being. Is it not just, then, that man, who is an intelligent and rational creature, should make it a religious duty to himself to be also present to Him in mind and in heart—considering Himself continually in God, and considering God in him, since there are such essential ties between God and him. At the same time that God is everywhere, He sees all things and observes all things. I ought then, as far as lies in my power, to have Him continually in view, and to walk always as having Him for a witness, not only of my actions, but of my most secret intentions—this God, whose penetration is infinite, to whom I, in spite of myself, serve as a continual

spectacle, and from whose knowledge nothing can conceal itself or escape. "Where shall I go, Lord," says David, 'to hide myself from Thy Divine understanding, and where shall I fly from before Thy face? If I mount up to heaven I meet Thee there; if I descend even to hell, Thou art present there also; if I take wings to fly to the extremity of the earth, it is Thy hand that guides me. I said to myself, perhaps the darkness will cover me; but I have known that even the darkest night becomes luminous to show me to Thee; for darkness, O my God, is not obscure to Thee, nor is the night less clear to Thee than the midday." Behold how this holy king reasoned with himself, concluding from thence the obligation he was under to keep himself always in the presence of his God. Why will I not conclude in like manner with myself and for myself?

SECOND POINT.

The utility of this exercise of the presence of God consists in its being a sovereign preservative against sin, and, moreover, a short and an abridged way to arrive at perfection. A sovereign preservative against sin, for there is nothing more proper to restrain and keep me within bounds than to think I am before God; nothing more efficacious to repress the motions of my passion, to make me triumph over the most violent temptations, to hinder me from falling on the most dangerous occasions, than to say to myself, I am in the presence of my Judge, in the presence of Him who is about to condemn me, and who is ready to pronounce sentence against me if I am so rash as to commit this sin. There is not, I say, any temptation that this reflection does not surmount; no passion so violent that it does not check; no frailty, no fall from which it does not preserve. For the most part our sins are occasioned by our losing the sight of God, and we would scarcely ever sin if we had God always present to us. To sin against God, says St. Augustine, is a crime; but he who sins with God in his view is a monster, and there would be but few sinners audacious enough to go so far if they were but prepossessed with this sentiment, *God sees me*. This is the reproach the prodigal child made

himself when he said, in the grief and bitterness of his soul, "My Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee." A short and abridged way to arrive at perfection. This is what God Himself taught Abraham when He said to him, "Walk in My presence, and you will be perfect." For the true perfection of the Christian and of the religious man consists in doing all their actions well—not to do them carelessly, but to do them with application and fervor. Now, what is there that can inspire me with this fervor in all my actions, what can animate me more, and correct in me the disorder of a negligent and sluggish life, than the sight and the presence of God? God examines me, and I have Him continually as a spectator : since this is the case, how can I be so tepid and languishing in His service and in what I do for Him? Moreover, this presence of God is a source of consolation for just souls, and a support in all the efforts and violences which the care of their perfection costs them. What can be sweeter than this thought, God is with me? All God as He is, He applies Himself to me, and is employed about me. Is not this thought alone more than sufficient to soften all the pains that may present themselves and to fortify us in all the combats we have to encounter? Such is the fruit of the presence of God. Let the just, says the Scripture, be filled with a holy joy; and how could it be otherwise, since they have God always before them, and since they are continually under the eyes of God.

THIRD POINT.

As to the practice, the exercise of the presence of God requires two things: the one is, to avoid carefully all that may be an obstacle to the presence of God; and the other is, to subject ourselves with fidelity to whatever we know is a means to acquire and preserve it. To avoid the obstacles. These are, for example, the vain amusements of the world; certain diversions in which the heart expands itself too openly; certain irregular joys which dissipate the mind; certain societies which divert us from our duties; certain ties of friendship which attach us to creatures, so as to be totally occupied about them; the excess of the desires

which agitate and divide us ; the vehemence of the passions which alter and disturb us ; the useless conversations which fill the imagination with trifles ; the superfluous cares which embarrass us ; the too frequent and too weighty occupations which oppress us ; a thousand affairs in which we engage ourselves, and a thousand causes of distraction which we bring on ourselves. All these obstacles are to be retrenched, because they are incompatible with the presence of God. It is but reasonable, O my God ! that I should take such precautions ; for, as Thy divine presence is for me so precious a treasure, there is nothing that I ought not to quit in order to possess it, and I can never purchase it too dearly. Happy, if by this means I come to obtain it, and if, by renouncing all other things, I find myself united to Thee by that blessed presence, which in this life is an anticipated felicity ! To subject ourselves to the means of acquiring and preserving the presence of God. Such are, prayer—asking daily of God this rich gift, and saying to Him, with the Royal Prophet, “ Lord, direct my ways before Thy eyes,” and let me never stray away from Thy presence ; silence and retirement—having each day regular hours to give ourselves to God, and to separate ourselves from the tumult of the world ; order in our actions—not doing any of them but through a spirit of obedience to God ; accomplishing them according to the holy will and good pleasure of God ; seeking God in the most indifferent of them, and proposing Him to ourselves as our end ; not considering creatures but as they ought to be considered—that is to say, as the images of God, as mirrors which represent to us the perfections of God—the heavens as the palace of His glory, the earth as His footstool, men as the ministers of His providence, prosperity as the effect of His bounty, and adversities as the chastisements of His justice. Behold the true and secret art of preserving always the presence of God. Behold the means whereby St. Ignatius of Loyola incessantly elevated himself to God : the very sight of a flower was enough to ravish him out of himself, and to give him the highest idea of the sovereign Author of Nature. May we, in like manner, according to the maxim of the Apostle, find God in all things and all places.

SIXTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On Obedience.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you see our Divine Lord in the holy house of Nazareth, obeying sweetly and cheerfully His creatures, Mary and Joseph.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg for the true spirit of prompt, entire, and perfect obedience.

FIRST POINT.

To comprehend the excellence of obedience, we must be convinced that by this virtue we subject ourselves, not to the will of man, but to the will of God, whose place man holds in our regard. The words of our Lord are explicit, when, having established the Apostles, the lawful superiors of the faithful, He said, “He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me,” St. Paul assures us “that there is no power but from God, and he that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.” Draw from this truth the following conclusions:—1st. Always to see God in your Superiors, never allowing your submission to be influenced by their personal qualities, their affection for you, or any such human consideration, which frequently prevents the merit of obedience. As a result of this first resolution, determine to receive their orders with great submission and profound respect, considering the will of God, more clearly manifested to you by their means than if an angel from heaven declared it. It is of Faith that God governs us by the lawfully-established powers, and it is certain that we must obey where there is no manifest sin.

SECOND POINT.

Having established the maxim, that to submit to superiors is to submit to the will of God, it is easy to infer the second advantage of obedience, which is to elevate the soul to high

perfection, consisting in union with God, as our Lord assures the Apostles, "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." And St. John, in his first epistle, says that "he that keepeth the word of God is perfected." How can we prove our love for God more effectually than by renouncing our own will to do His? Is it not to this spiritual sacrifice St. Denis alludes when he says that Divine love produces ecstasies, transporting the soul it animates out of herself into the object of her tenderness, and substituting God's will for hers? Perfect obedience produces this effect, uniting our will to that of God; so that it is no longer we who live and act, but Jesus Christ, who lives and acts in us, our actions springing from the same source whence His arise—viz., the Divine Will. Desire ardently to share in these great advantages, and for this resolve to animate your acts of obedience, by the motive of love, according to the recommendation of St. Peter, in his first epistle, "Purify your souls in the obedience of charity," "that you may be among those who are faithful in love," and who unconditionally submit to God in all things. Thus will you render the yoke of obedience most sweet and light.

THIRD POINT.

By obedience we give great glory to God, and in this consists its third excellence. He has Himself declared that He prefers obedience even to sacrifice, by which man renders Him supreme honour. The reason is, that obedience sacrifices to God the most excellent part of His most noble creature, namely, the will and liberty of man; and by thus subjecting to His sovereign dominion the most prized of His works, it glorifies Him more than by the sacrifice of other creatures formed for the use of man. As by obedience we give great glory to God, our gracious Master, in return, bestows peculiar favours on the soul which submits unreservedly to Him by the perfect practice of this virtue. "Thou shalt be called," says He by the Prophet Isaiah, "by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. And thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be called forsaken,

but thou shalt be called My pleasure in her." Such are the glorious privileges of the truly obedient, who observe exactly the orders of their Superiors and the rules of their Institute. The Almighty looks with complacency on such souls as on the living images of His Son, whom He calls, by the same Prophet, "the man of His own will." Implore the grace to practice this meritorious virtue, in imitation of our Lord.

SIXTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On Charity.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you hear St. John saying to his disciples, "My little children, love one another."

SECOND PRELUDE.—Ask for the true spirit of holy charity.

FIRST POINT.

The virtue of charity, like those of detachment and conformity, necessarily results from the love of our Lord Jesus Christ; but, as it has its specific qualities and its specific duties, we should recognize it and love and conserve it for His sake, and for its own sake, as a beautiful and inestimable gift given by Him. Beautiful and inestimable it is. In the sight of it, the wise man seems to have lost all power of expression, and to commit to an exclamation the embodying of the countless excellences which he could not describe: "How good and how beautiful," he says, "it is for brethren to dwell in peace." Good, certainly, and beautiful. Loving one another in God; sympathizing each in the other's pains; rejoicing in each other's success; meeting kindness with abundant and smiling return, and conquering frowardness by patient love; aiding every advance and congratulating on every success; receiving abundant affection, and giving in emulative superabundance. What peace! What progress! What a heaven is here! God

cannot look upon anything more worthy of His divine admiration. "The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace." Secondly, we should remember that this virtue is peculiarly the virtue of Christianity. Selfishness, disordered selfishness, was supreme in the pagan world. Isolated, legal hate. No one was esteemed for more than he could contribute to the ends of the person to whom his qualities appealed. Hatred or love were only other names for the feeling raised by things which could subserve passion or which opposed it, and the result was, antagonism in the class not dependent and contempt for the multitude differently placed. Christianity taught the law of brotherhood, and gave the spirit by which the law is observed. As St. Fulgentius says, "Our love increases by distribution, and is destroyed by retention." Thus the greatest gift of God is amplified by sharing it, and lost by selfishly retaining it. Our common weakness teaches us the same doctrine. Cast upon a world against whose trials we have constantly to contend, we all hurry along towards a final resting-place; surrounded by enemies, and identified in interest, it appears a horrible thing to be insensible to one another's good. If insensibility is changed into hostility, our relations seem still more unholy and unreasonable, and there can be no wonder that the common enemy should take advantage of our unhappy state. We have quite sufficient to encounter in his malice, and we dissipate our resources by quarreling among ourselves. We have been given as a mutual assistance, and we separate and expose ourselves and each other. We tend to the closest union for all eternity, and in the way thither we disunite. We live in the expectation of the rewards of charity, and we fling charity away. We proclaim allegiance to the King and Father, who loves the thing which we neglect or, it may be, assail—loves it, no matter what may be its failings, and we foolishly expect that He will be unmindful of our prevarication.

SECOND POINT.

You cannot love God unless you love the neighbour. This you know. And this commandment we have from God, that he who loves God loves also his brother. Now,

what is all our exertion worth? Where does all our devotion tend unless the love of God has been granted, or will be granted, to our prayers, sighs, and deeds? Yet God has pledged His solemn truth that this love is inseparable from the other, to which we are directing our attention. There is no hope unless we love one another. St. John had no other exhortation for many a year than "love one another," because he said it was sufficient if observed, and it was the great precept of the Lord. Do we love? If so, thank God. Do we not love? If so, we have not commenced. Nay, we do not love to commence; for, as St. Fulgentius says, "We cannot love charity without charity; the love must be there before it is exercised." But if we have charity you know its qualities. It does not consist in a barren affection. Charity is action. Love is interested in everything regarding its object. It will assist it, cherish it, study its convenience, anticipate its desires, defend its claims, labour for it, until love produces every effect by which the object of its regard is made happy. If we love the sisterhood, therefore, we will see any evil approaching them with solicitude and anxious exertion to avert it. We will hail their success in any occupation or engagement. We will pray for them, encourage them, assist them in every way, and be thankful to God that He has given us the means. Remember the Acts of the Apostles, "The multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul." This is your characteristic if you be in a religious house, and it is the characteristic of each individual to produce this if she be a religious. "The nun who has not charity is a religious in name, but not in reality; she is a sister in dress, but not in affection," said the Founder of the Visitation.

THIRD POINT.

One is almost startled by the sayings of St. Paul on this august virtue. We think, as we hear him, that he has just come forth from the Last Supper, and put into words of fire the dear precept of our Lord Jesus Christ; or we think that, after kneeling at the feet of Christ crucified, and remembering the last precept spoken by His divine lips before He

went to die, the Apostle rose with his mind so exalted by the spirit of charity that he could find no language of his day expressive enough to convey an accurate idea of the necessity and grandeur of charity in a Christian soul. After speaking of the great gifts which the early preachers of God's word manifested, and many of the humble followers of our Lord enjoyed, these wonders, which awakened the death-sleep of indifference and sobered the delirium of passion—because they (the works) wore the presence of eternity—St. Paul said he would show them something grander, more godlike, and nearer God than any of them—that is, charity. May we so value it! Far, indeed, above all gifts and inseparable from all graces, the guardian angel of peace and efficiency, and the life immortal of a religious house, is charity. Every violation of charity is a wound inflicted upon the very institute itself; every acquisition gives stronger, more permanent, and more effective existence. May heaven ever preserve it among us!

SIXTH DAY.

FIRST LECTURE.

On Obedience.

Obedience was the first duty imposed on man by the Author of his being. His destiny was to be regulated by his submission, and this virtue was intended for the foundation of his permanent greatness and felicity. He disobeyed. Degraded in his own eyes, as well as criminal, he blushed for his guilt; he sought an asylum in darkness, to hide himself from his shame and from the humiliating consequences of his revolt. Man, then, is truly great only in that state of dependence wherein he is submissive to God and docile to the divine will. This is the foundation of the dignity resulting from holy obedience, for it is not man, a mortal creature, whom you obey—it is God Himself. Ponder these words: it is God whom you obey. You are subject to the laws of that Sovereign Master, who commands the kings and rulers

of the world. Endeavour to comprehend the degree of dignity to which such noble dependence elevates you. How truly exalted is man when, in the silence of adoration, his obedient will bends before the Supreme Being, sacrificing to Him its most legitimate inclinations; when from the altar on which he immolates himself, a willing victim, his spirit soars to the bosom of God, unites itself to the Sovereign Truth, and, absorbed in the ocean of eternal light, borrows from the Divinity its splendour and its glory! The glory of the obedience practised in religion results first from the object to whom that obedience is offered. It is God whom you obey. Persons living in the world are also bound to obey; but how and from what motives do they obey? First, how do they obey? Their submission is generally compulsory—the tribute not of the heart, but of necessity. They obey without consolation, without unction, without comfort. God has no part in their sacrifice, and His sweet presence never lightens its difficulties. You obey in religion; but the greatness of the Master whom you serve, whose image is stamped on the brow of your Superiors and engraven on the heart of the obedient, animates you to obey with promptitude, facility, and joy; and the more perfect is the dependence, the greater is the peace it affords. In the second place, what is the motive which influences the obedience of the worldling? His submission is interested, based but too often on the indulgence of his passions. He consents to depend on a fellow-creature to procure an elevated situation, a particular favour, a suitable establishment. If, in order to ensure substantial profit as the fruit of submission, it be necessary to submit unjustly and criminally, he hesitates not; he shamelessly infringes all the laws of conscience and equity. In religion you obey—to honour, by your dependence, the sovereign dominion of God over His creature; to render homage to the Divine Will; to acquire, by the faithful accomplishment of that holy Will, the holiness and perfection which will render you agreeable in the eyes of the Lord. It is God whom you obey. His Will becomes the principle and the end of your actions, and elevates them to a supernatural order. It ennobles the most common, it sanctifies the most indifferent,

it enhances the merit and value of the most holy. In the world how many actions are lost because performed without principle and without rule; because not referred to God; because done to His disgrace, and influenced by carnal motives, which corrupt them. In holy religion you may say, with confidence, the days I spend in religion are days replete with merit; everything here is great, everything holy, because inspired, directed, and consecrated by the will of God. The Almighty reproves those heroic actions and brilliant achievements which are the work of nature and the passions. In the sanctuary of religion the life of the fervent religious is composed of a tissue of actions marked with the Divine seal, and ensuring to the performer happiness and immortality. God reigns in tranquillity over the heart immolated to His will; and whilst His jealous eye disdains the vain sacrifices of pageantry and show, the obedience of the religious mounts like sweetest incense to the eternal throne, and from the centre of His glory the God of virtues, who sounds the reins and hearts of His creatures, looks on with satisfaction, preferring it to the blood of victims: better is obedience than victims. The Eternal Word, the Sovereign of heaven and earth, obeys. After this example, can obedience degrade a mortal? Did the submission of a God to His creature appear to Him in the light of self-abasement? Was the God of glory and majesty ignorant of what constitutes true greatness? A God obeys, and the object of your state is to honour, by imitation, the submission of a Man-God. The obedience you practise is voluntary, generous, constant, formed on the example and animated by the spirit of Jesus Christ. Let human pride revolt at the mere name of dependence and submission, but to the Christian heart how dear is the subjection consecrated by the example of a God! how elevated does it seem to the eye of faith! "Then said I: Behold, I come to do Thy will, O God!" It is God whom you obey. What a consolation will it be to you to terminate, in the exercise of obedience, a life which has been sanctified by the constant practice of this great virtue! Your dying glance will fall upon a God who is obedient unto death—the example you behold you will

have faithfully imitated. Your last words will be those of the Saviour expiring in submission to the orders of His Father; the sentiments you then express you will have always reduced to practice. Having followed your Model of obedience in the way of abnegation, you will likewise follow Him on the road to glory. Elevated hereafter in proportion to your humility here, you will trample on and judge a world which now contemns and judges you. "The obedient man shall speak victories."

SEVENTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On Fervor.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you see your Angel Guardian writing in his book each of your actions, according as you perform them, in letters either of gold, silver, or water.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg the grace of being truly fervent in the service of your Good Master.

FIRST POINT.

The greatest preservative against sin of all kinds is fervor in the service of God. The practice of fervor is the constant performance of every duty actively and fervently; and this constancy is like a strong chain, the links of which hang closely together, and allow nothing to interpose between them. Besides this, we must think well that the absence of fervor is, we may say, the presence of tepidity, which, once master of our movements, is a mark of evil-doing. Few have been ever known to recover a life of fervor who have once been governed any considerable time by tepidity. We must not mistake for fervor those gusts and fits of earnestness which are mere fits of nature, and mostly imperfections, because they indicate an absence of self-control and recollec-

tion. Fervor is a supernatural earnestness in the service of God ; an earnestness springing from love and appreciation—love such as God deserves and demands, and appreciation, such as consciousness of what He is and what we owe Him necessarily produces. Such earnestness is necessarily uniform, and extends to everything, great and small. In fact, nothing is small ; it grows great in the view of Him for whom it is performed. Have we this fervor ? Always, with open eye and ear, and with ready hand, to do when and what God, who is Duty, commands. If we have, may God be blessed ! If we have not, we will begin honestly to aim at the attainment of it. The object of our devotion, of every deed we perform, is God ! What an impulse to true and grand fervor ! If exactness and perfection are looked upon as essential to a due service where the great ones of this world demand homage, what ought to be the earnestness and exactness of the service offered to God Almighty ! That the service is accepted at all is the wonder, and, only for our Lord's Passion, would be impossible ; and when it is accepted, and this wonder of benevolence is established, how can we imagine anyone presenting to the great Creator anything less than the best she can offer ? Lord, reveal to me how far I have retained the force of this reflection whilst I wrought on ; and teach me such a correction of my habits as to make my works a little worthy of Thee, through Jesus and Mary.

SECOND POINT.

Remember that the Being whom you serve is the Being whom you love, and whom, through the teaching of faith, you have known and believed. Now, what will love, real love, accomplish for the object of regard ? Loved as we have been with an infinite love, and coming and called in here to manifest a reciprocation, and a perfect reciprocation, of infinite love, what is our condition ? The perfect reciprocation of infinite love certainly does not fall short of our whole power. It does not fall short of doing all we can, as well as we can, and with an earnest, affectionate will, ever to pursue the objects of our holy vocation.

Again, we expect the highest reward that can be obtained for the actions we perform. We need not speak of kingdoms and empires, or gold and precious stones, because all these things are as the smallest grain of sand compared with what we expect and know we shall receive. Eye hath not seen "such a reward as we hope for;" ear hath not heard any estimate of its value or object to compare with it; and, notwithstanding the dreams of happiness that have filled the minds of all ages, "it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive" the reward we anticipate. that reward is so transcendent. Is this reward to be claimed for imperfect actions, when the most perfect actions do not approach it in measure of desert? Is this the reward which we expect for all eternity for the little which we can perform in a few years, and not make that little as fair as we may? O my God! and have I been unmindful of how much Thou hast prepared for my little, my nothing, my less than nothing, and, yet, has that nothing been rendered more worthless by the manner in which it has been laid upon Thy altar! And then, behold also the graces given by God to produce fruits perfectly and abundantly. Grace God has given to us, not in the measure which is dealt to secular life, but in proportion to our dignity and our duties. Where have all these graces gone? Have they been employed or abused? Let us think, O my soul! of the multitude of them from morning till night, in every place and at every engagement—our choir, mass, school, visitation, hospital, prayer, always ready and always helping. Have we made vain the declaration, "My word shall not return to Me void?" That word of His grace which He has given us. Pardon me! pardon me! O my Father! Let not the abuse of graces rise in judgment against me, and strengthen my resolution to arise!

THIRD POINT.

The most potent reason for arriving at a grand fervor is, that its absence is tepidity. This is quite natural. Imperfect actions, half done, or with half spirit, show want of due appreciation of God, and a certain value for natural indul-

gence. Thence comes impatience of recollection and watchfulness; sparing ourselves as much as we can; omitting what we can without blame or observation; performing what we do distractedly, dissipatedly, and with disgust; distaste for persons, places, and engagements; a false conscience, and final ruin. Such a person is to herself a misery, and to all around a scandal, for whom there is hope in the beginning, but certainly very little in the end. O Lord! save me from even an approach to such a state. "Save me, or I perish." Earnest activity springing from love is the meaning of fervor. Excitement menaces it; hypocrisy pretends it: pride may counterfeit this fervor, but it comes only from love and appreciation. Then all things are the same to it. All places are the same for it. All occupations the same, the lowest always being highest and best, because they unite us more with our Father. We will think beforehand what we have to do, because it is God's service. We will plan and lay out the means for doing it perfectly, because it is God's service. We will leave no part, not the minutest, unperformed, because it is God's service. There will be a finish, a beauty, and entirety about everything we do, because it is God's service. And, finally, everything will be done with a quiet pleasure that springs from a ready will and a memory or a consciousness of our Father's work being in progress. "The due performance of our daily actions consists in doing them with a truly pure intention and a generous resolution to please God alone. This is, as it were, the very life and soul of our actions, that which gives them all their value, and makes them both easy and full of sweetness," says St. Francis de Sales.

SEVENTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On the Religious State.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you see the five Wise Virgins trimming their lamps, and preparing to meet the Heavenly Bridegroom.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Ask our Divine Lord to teach you how to adorn your soul with the virtues which will render you most pleasing to Him on your Reception morning, which is now so near at hand.

FIRST POINT.

We must feel that the greatest favour God could confer upon us is the strictest union with Himself; and, next to that, is to place us in that condition in which progress to union becomes the exclusive object of our lives, and the graces for the accomplishment of which are as certainly given as the vocation to our state. As the Apostle says, the vocation is “holy,” and the vocation is “His own,” and the vocation is from all eternity. “Holy” it is, because it springs from the source of all holiness, and “holy” it is because its objects and the means of obtaining them are all “holy.” That is, they are surrounded with the graces of God, and sanctified by their immediate nearness to the sanctity of God, and by the exclusion from their circle of anything which bears not some special relation to the loveliness and holiness of God. Yet for all this, God has before the beginning of ages destined one so unworthy as I am, and before all ages prepared the graces, inspirations, and special aids required by my weakness to render me effectively able to take advantage of His high calling. “Oh! what is man, that thou art mindful of him!” O my God, may you make me worthy of the vocation, who hast given it to me without any merit of mine! No works of ours produced this grand vocation, nor prayers of parents or friends. The

eternal predilection alone has wrought the miracle "in Jesus Christ." Have I been grateful? Have I shown the marks of gratitude? Have I tried to make myself pleasing to my God? O my God, I pray and I resolve!

SECOND POINT.

Most evidently the profession to which I am called is that of perfect Christianity. We are to show the world the holiness of the Gospel, the charity of the Gospel, the unselfishness of the Gospel, the long suffering of the Gospel, the Christian devotion to God's glory, and the Christian love of the poor and the young. Thus was Jesus Christ always to be among men in the representation of His beneficence and benignity and holiness seen in the cloister. Have I corresponded with God's will and wish and my own resolutions? Have I yet to begin? May the Author and Founder of our faith so hold me by the hand that I shall never faint by the way, or become unworthy of my vocation by my infidelity. For this work we have been taken from the world and the world's ways. Had we been left in the world, like most of those who are exposed to its snares, we should, very likely, make a kind of Gospel of our own, and end, as many end, in wretchedness. God brought us here out of the world's ways to be the world's contrast and corrective. What, my soul, if I have kept any of the world's ways? What if I have kept many of them? Have I the world's spirit of self-indulgence, self-will, vain glory, uncharitableness? Pause well and consider. What might have been our lot in the world had we been left there, experience may tell. Life a delusion, and everything unreal, until death comes to demand the work of life, perhaps hardly yet begun. If we were unfortunate in temporals, we had the trials of poverty; if fortunate, we had the scarcely less temptation of pride. In an humble state we were tempted by ambition; in an exalted state, tempted by pride. Every responsibility a new danger, and responsibilities growing every day. Envy pursuing us, malevolence biting us, jealousy belying us, insincerity trading on us, peace ever disturbed, and even reason often shaken by trial! From that, all that, God in

His mercy hath saved us, making Himself our hope, inheritance, and strength ! And if we fling Him off, if we forget Him even, nay, if we do not value all these benedictions, and seek to give Him the homage of a perfect obedience, at any rate, for the most wonderful interposition in our favour, can we say that the commonest gratitude animates our feelings ? O my soul ! let us commence from this hour ; let nothing be too great to undertake, and nothing too small to forget it, when we work for such a Father.

THIRD POINT.

We have a clear evidence of the objects of God, and the graces He confers for attaining them, in the history of the religious of every age and country. They have been the "light on the mountain" on their way to heaven. From the cloisters have come the names now upon our altars—at least, as a rule. The saints to whom we pray, the blessed confessors, abbots, virgins, and widows, were generally from the peaceful convent cell carried to the churchyard, only to fill the world with the praises of their sanctity when afterwards the sick and the halt, the blind and the maimed, came as witnesses of the holiness which they had done their best to conceal. And in that noble family I have been placed, with the consciousness of their greatness and my duty. I am to be like them ; I may not deny the lineage : can I deny the work ? Oh ! no, my God, weak, imperfect, sinful, all worthless as I am, you are my dependence ! On Thee I will rely "My heart is prepared, my heart is prepared, for evermore." We are to remember that the religious state has been given into our hands for protection and propagation ; its life is from God, but entrusted to our keeping. Its life is for all ages, but given to our hands as a trust for perpetual tending and watching. Everything which in the least degree impairs the effectiveness of the institute is a blow at its life and an opposition to its existence. Each for this reason has the care of all ; each prays for all ; each helps all ; each extends the sympathies of an honest, genial love to all ; each will anticipate the other's wants and desire ; each, readily, in everything

spiritual and temporal, will stretch out the helping hand of love. In the recreation time, in the refectory, in the school, or in the choir, in the chapel, each has care of all, and endeavours to make all as good and happy as she can. We see each and all in the "religious state," and that state God has given us to be handed fresh, vigorous, and beautiful to the survivors when we are going away to heaven. Listen to our Lord, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Walk His Way, embrace His Truth, live His Life. Behold, O my soul, your vocation!

SEVENTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On the Most Blessed Sacrament.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Observe with a little attention the total absence of majesty Jesus Christ shows in the Tabernacle.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Beg of Him to let you fully understand the secret intentions of His Heart in a state so unworthy of His greatness, and the grace of an effectual love of Him by imitation.

FIRST POINT.

Self-abasement and the love of everything that can contribute to it form the character of humility. Observe the abasement of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. He totally conceals everything that gives honour. What mark do you see of His divinity? Splendour, majesty, the attending bands of angels and throne of glory—where are they? What appearance betrays itself of that power which supports the whole world, of that wisdom that governs it, of that sovereignty which reigns in heaven and on earth? Could He hide Himself more if He feared to be honoured in this Sacrament, as the God that He is? Could He even debase

Himself more if He really desired to be disregarded and despised? His abode is nothing but a narrow lodging of wood, or at most of stone; and although a few altars are kept becomingly, numberless others, on which He remains, are so destitute, even dirty and wretched, that the dwelling of an artizan is neater. He could have made it a precept in Christianity that the gold and finest jewels in the city should be devoted to His tabernacles, as formerly in the ancient temple built by Solomon. But though He knew what would happen to Him, He has abandoned Himself in this respect to the indolence, the avarice, and the irreligion of ungrateful men. What a complete example of the sincerest humility of heart! It is not necessity, it is His Heart that generously chooses such humiliations and such a contemptible appearance and state. Here, then, is a Heart that loves humility with a sincerity beyond suspicion. And this is the humility He wishes you to imitate. Examine your words and the acts of humility which you sometimes perform; are they voluntary and loving? Are you as indifferent as Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament whether you are treated with honour or contempt? Do you resign your honour, as He does, into the hands of others? Ah! what a model!—what a school!—what a difference between you and your Lord, and yet the one but a slave, the other a King. *Resolve and pray.*

SECOND POINT.

Consider two striking circumstances of the humility of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. First, a heart less fond of humility than that of Jesus might have believed that, for the greater glory of God, He should have set bounds to His debasement in this adorable Sacrament. This God, present in the Blessed Sacrament, would have been more easily honoured and respected there if He had, at least from time to time, let some sensible sign of His hidden majesty betray itself. But not so, thought the Heart of Jesus Christ. He wished that the example of His humility in the Blessed Sacrament should be perfect to the last degree. Reflect, religious soul, that it is sometimes your secret vanity that

deceives you. If I remain silent, if I yield, honour, justice, and innocence are lost. Ah! do you not know that the highest honour of innocence is to be innocently undervalued, and that the greatest glory of justice is to be unjustly oppressed? This is the beloved maxim of the humble Heart of Jesus; and to many souls, even in religious houses, and even in objects in themselves small, this maxim frequently gives opportunities of great and heroic acts. Secondly, a heart less fond of humility than the Heart of Jesus might have believed that to let itself be sensibly known by men, a little at least, was likely to produce more fruit in souls. O Loving, Incarnate Love! what heart amongst us could have resisted even a fleeting glimpse, only seen by us once in life in a sensible manner, of the sweet and heavenly beauty, were it only of Thy adorable humanity? But not so thought the Heart of Jesus Christ. He, the Infinite Wisdom, thought it most for our good to give us in the Blessed Sacrament the greatest example of His humility. Ah! then pride, vain esteem of yourself, your natural haughtiness, has been considered, O religious soul, by Jesus Christ as His and your greatest enemy. Jesus Christ, to undeceive us, by His own example, in a thing of so much consequence, has even renounced the more easy acquisition of our tender love. O my Jesus, infinitely adorable, and infinitely humbled! more dear art Thou to me, precisely as Thou art more humbled for my instruction. Examine your particular circumstances, make particular resolutions, and beg with a great heart for great helps.

SEVENTH DAY.

FIRST LECTURE.

On the Rule.

We must have a great respect for the rules and constitutions, and we ought, for that end, consider their origin, their end, and their obligation. If a rule ever be lost, we may feel assured the rule has not been kept. St. Paul's prayer

for the Galatians who were faithful to the rule laid down by him is always efficacious for the child of obedience : "Who-soever observes this rule, peace may descend upon them, and mercy, and on the Israel of God." We must remember that our rule is the inspiration of God. It is one of the large family of rules by which perfect life is sustained in the Church ; the special agent of the divine grace ; the spring of the life abounding with works of God's providence, mercy, and justification ; and the stamp and form of the interior which God selects for His abode. Faith grows strong and brilliant in the protection of the rule ; hope cannot live without the ministering help of the rule ; and love presents the rule to love as the law of its attachment—the surest way to rivet union with eternal love, and the surest sign that eternal love animates the soul of its favoured child. With profound reverence, then, should we ever regard it, and with profound gratitude. Reverence, because it comes from God to accomplish the will and work of God's beneficence, and comes from God, in particular, for my sanctification. May I always look upon it, then, as God's minister of love—minister of love to me, and minister of hope and love to myself and others—and, therefore, respect it as God present to my soul, and speaking as director of my ways. The rule never dies. It is immortal, and immortal in its power. "Virtue goes forth from it," curing many and preserving us. The rule is, therefore, a sacred trust placed in the hands of superiors and subjects, to be transmitted from generation to generation, and through all time to form, sanctify, and save those who are subject to it ; and by them and through them intended to scatter the gifts and blessings of divine love in the world among the poor, ignorant, wretched, sinful, shedding light upon the darkness of death, and snatching iniquity from the grasp of despair. In truth, it is an Emanuel, God with us, which we are to preserve vigorous among us, each for all and all for each. This grand deposit we must watch, as we said, for its own sake ; we must watch it for our own sakes ; we must watch it for the community's sake ; we must watch it for the world's sake ; and we must watch it for the sake of the future as well as the present. August messenger and gift of God ! if any one of us interfere

with thee, as far as the infraction is concerned, we run counter not to one, but to a thousand designs of Christ. What *we do ourselves* we bid others do by a language more powerful than words—the language of our example, which plainly says, it is good to do it. And we thus do our own share towards disintegrating religious life, and destroying it for ever! The rule is the form of religion in each of us; what distinguishes each of us from the mere secular, and our lives from mere secular lives. The religious of perfect observance has little or nothing of the world, and the religious of imperfect observance keeps the world just in proportion to inobservance. It is quite evident that the rule perfectly kept is the form of Jesus Christ, and the actions flowing out from our daily life are therefore His actions, just as far as we keep His form perfectly within us. There is no difference between us and the world unless our rule. “The habit maketh not the religious,” as St. Bernard well declares. What, then, does infraction mean? Why, it means so far turning worldling again, and so far robbing the community of all religious character, and making it a congregation of seculars. Of course we may not do all the evil, but it is because others are better than we, not because we do not run the risk of doing it. And besides, like venial sin, who knows what our act may lead to? Many religious orders have been changed, and many have disappeared; many will change and disappear, because they will lose the religious spirit. Some one must have begun; and from that religious ruin was begotten. Who can say that the first act of infraction may not be the first of the last towards disruption? Oh! let us never neglect, never change, never modify our rule! Our wisdom is not likely to be greater than the wisdom that produced the rule; it is likely to be the “wisdom of the flesh,” which “is death.” The rule is not only the form of Jesus in the true religious, but it is the perfect form. The Carthusian has his own rule, and so has the Trappist, and the Capuchin, and the rest; but, in our order, our rule is the form of our holiness. This imports two things equally important. The first is, that no practice of ours should go outside the rule; the second, that our study in all our habits of life should be

how we shall most effectively obey the direction of the rule. In going outside the rule you pretend to a better knowledge of the way to holiness than the Church, who placed the rule in your hands. If the Church needed such performance as yours she could have presented them. In neglecting the means for efficiently observing and carrying out the spirit of the rule, you might as well violate the rules at once. If I fast so as to be unable to work, I may as well give up the rule and live by my own lights and desires. If, by hearing news, or indulging in distracting thoughts, thinking of secular life, I am unable to meditate, I might as well have given up meditation. So that nothing can be more true than the two maxims—1st. The rule is the form of Jesus Christ in me; and (2nd.) when I do or neglect anything which renders me unable to observe it well, I might as well directly commit a breach of the rule. It is quite true that this rule does not bind under mortal sin, taking any one item. But we must remember that such a violation of it as to strip our life of the character of religious would be a mortal sin. From this it is quite plain that such a disposition as for one to violate as much rule as one can would be a mortal sin, because it is a desire to violate the vow to perfect life. We must add that, according to the teaching of St. Thomas, the matter of the rule might belong to some commandment or vow, and then the evil of mortal sin is quite evident; or, when one has gone so far as to resist for resistance's sake—to violate, because one will not obey—in malice, such a violation is clear contempt. Let us pray for a right spirit and a vigorous will to love our rule, and to esteem it as the image of a soul made to the likeness of Christ. And the "peace" which St. Paul promises always descends upon the observant child of rule. Why not? The unselfish are the peaceful. The true child of rule is always mortified, always active, always obedient, always loving, always interior, and always detached—in a word, she has "put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

EIGHTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.

On the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you see our Divine Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, showing His Heart to the Ven. M. M. Alacoque. It is wounded, surrounded by flames, encircled with thorns, and surmounted by a cross.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Resolve to make satisfaction to the best of your power to this Heart, so loving and so little loved.

FIRST POINT.

What are the sentiments of the Divine Heart towards man in this sacrament? They are sentiments of the most lively and sincere love. What the midday is to the sun, such is the Blessed Sacrament to the love of Jesus for us—the culminating point of its light and heat. What is Jesus doing in the Blessed Sacrament? He is loving us. Behold an answer which says everything and satisfies all that can be asked about Him! Why does He come to you? Because He loves us. How does He remain with you? As a God who loves! What does He desire for you? That which love desires. Why does He so multiply Himself? Why is He so patient with you? Why does He thus hide Himself? Because He loves, because He loves. On the cross love shared its empire with, or, rather, was subservient to, justice. Here love reigns alone, and all is subservient to it. Wisdom, power, providence, immensity, employed themselves to this end, that love may have its final satisfaction. Blind creature, see what the Heart of your God is for you. And do you not experience this every day? Sinful souls, how does He receive you here? His complaints, His lamentations, His reproaches, His very terrors, are but emotions of love. Tepid and imperfect souls, has He ever driven you from

Him? Does He not, on the contrary, offer you light and medicine, and comfort and encouragement? But you, O pure and fervent souls, ah! it is yours to testify to the world what this Divine Heart is in the Blessed Sacrament. What condescensions! What forgetfulness of its own greatness! What artifices! What interior speeches! What caresses! What torrents of delight! Linger here, O religious soul, and apply all these reflections to yourself. Take up the place which once, perhaps, belonged to you, and then that which now belongs to you, whether among sinners, or the imperfect, or the fervent. The affections which you should call forth are those especially of admiration, praise, and thanksgiving. Ah! perhaps in all your life you have never returned express thanks to this Divine Heart for this excess of love.

SECOND POINT.

What are the feelings of most men towards the Heart of Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar? See how many do not even know there is a God who has reduced Himself to this state for love of them, and Jesus Christ, meanwhile, is actually employed in loving all in His Sacrament. And of these blind ones some wilfully close their eyes, though invited to become acquainted with their Lord, and to consider Him. And is not this, O Jesus, the most monstrous contempt of all Thy love? Ah! no—this is not the worst of the cruel treatments which the greater part of Christians offer to the loving Heart of their God in this Sacrament. Full well do they know, ungrateful creatures, and profess to believe, His immense love in the Blessed Sacrament. But how do they correspond? Ah! religious soul, now review in thought the infidelities, the irreverences, the dishonour, the sacrileges, the insults which the Heart of Jesus suffers from Christians in this Sacrament. Consider the circumstances of time, manner, number, persons, which aggravate these wrongs. Excite yourselves to a great, a holy indignation at the sight of such outrages, and then reflect upon your own behaviour. What, have you, too, ill-treated your Divine Lover? Run over your past life. Good God!

And perhaps your ingratitude has gone on increasing with your years! O terrible thought, if the purity, the devotion, the fervor of your first communions have been continually relaxing. At such a sight, O throw yourself in spirit at the foot of this Throne of Love, burying yourself in confusion. Beg light to recognize and detest yourself, and plenteous grace to form suitable resolutions.

THIRD POINT.

What are the feelings of this Divine Heart with regard to the unworthy return made to it by men? That we may come to understand them, let us first consider what they justly might be. How did this same God treat the Hebrew nation, when ungrateful for the favour of His abode with them in the ancient Temple? He repudiated the Temple, and razed it to its very foundations, and protested that He departed from their nation for ever. Surely the Christians, so much more highly favoured, would deserve no less; but God's love is far greater than our offences. What patience, what charity, what invincible sweetness! Here Jesus is still the meek Lamb, dumb beneath the knife that slays it. True, He has sometimes given vent to His feelings in secret with souls whom He loved, but His complaints are but stronger proofs of His love. Hear how He spoke to the Ven. M. M. Alacoque of the forgetfulness of men: "This is a greater torment to Me than any I suffered in My Passion, If men did but render Me love for love, I should count as nothing all that I have yet done for them, and would willingly do even more, if it were possible; but the desire I have to benefit them meets with no return but coldness and repulse!" What feeling do these tender complaints of the Heart of Love excite in you? "But that which most afflicts Me," He said to her on another occasion, "is, that I should be so treated by hearts consecrated to Me." Ah! here Jesus Christ speaks of you, religious soul, cold, unfaithful, insensible to the outrages offered to Him. To preserve always in yourself a tender gratitude for such great love, a lively sorrow for such ingratitude, an efficacious desire to make reparation by service and love on your part,

these are the affections which you should excite. These three affections form the distinguishing character of a heart devoted to the Adorable Heart of Jesus. Resolve, offer, beg grace, and thus dispose yourself to make a gift, an entire sacrifice of yourself.

EIGHTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.

On Heaven.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you hear the words, “Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you.”

SECOND PRELUDE.—Ask the Lord to bestow on you all the graces of your holy state, that you may one day merit to hear those consoling words.

FIRST POINT.

We must sometimes think on the country to which we ought to tend, and for which we have been born and redeemed. God made us for Himself, which means heaven. He saved us for Himself, which means heaven; and the sacraments and succours, the forgiveness of sin, and the grace which He gave us in conflict, were intended to re-open heaven for us, and to preserve our right to beatitude. We are made for heaven, then, and by a merciful solicitude our dear Father keeps preserving when we tend to destroy, and ordains everything to lead us by the hand of mercy and love to His heaven. Let us, then, think of heaven—our own home—and the attractions of the strange land of pilgrimage will no longer corrupt and stay us; but we shall long “for the wings of the dove, to flee away and be at rest.” We may call to mind that God permits in His mercy what the world calls “evil” to befall many, indeed nearly all, of His own beloved children in this world; and, furthermore, that the most audacious wrong-doers possess what the

world calls its "goods." Hence, two things stand in the face of His justice to be reconciled—that is to say, the enjoyments of those who hate Him and the sufferings of those who love and fear Him. If the good and holy and patient had no home of bliss beyond the grave, and if their condition were not very different, indeed, from the iniquitous, we should have reason to wonder, because in such a case God should give no reward for obedience, and He should punish fidelity, while wickedness should possess any benefits He bestowed. "Come, you blessed of My Father," is the solution of this difficulty, and, thanks to His Holy Name, we hear the invitation. Oh! let us go, my soul; let us flee away to the bosom of Abraham, the home of the prophets, the land of the apostles and martyrs—the nightless region where God pours forth the effulgence of His beauty over the regions of eternal bloom! Let us see them, enjoy the vision of peace, and long for "this tabernacle to be dissolved" which stays our flight to joy. And the incessant desire which we have for unalterable happiness, is it not the revelation of our dear God to our souls that our bliss is arriving unless we mar it? With everyone the story is still the same—happiness is the promise of the present, and never the possession; and so we all go on from day to day, led by the hand of hope to the place of our treasure, but only one class see their way. The worldling grasps a phantom, and keeps hurrying after the ever-changing form, pursued so vainly, and cries "vanity of vanities" at last; the religious cries, "this is my hope in my bosom," and awaits the revelation. But in every case, and in all men, the fountain of hope is flowing, and the sea of eternity there must be to which it tends; for our dear Lord would not, and could not, implant a natural tendency that hurried on towards an object which had no existence, any more than He could assure us that a thing existed which had no being. The love of happiness is the voice of our Father, that He has happiness in store for us if we follow His path; and, oh! may we never leave His side, never be separated from His direction, never indifferent to His invitation; and may we arise from grace to grace until the crowning grace of fruition—fruition of Him—has been bestowed.

SECOND POINT.

It is not possible to describe the glory of heaven, because its glory is God, and our minds have no knowledge by which God or God's bliss could be outlined in word or thought. We may accumulate things which must be there, and which should of themselves produce much enjoyment, and the security of the possession of which bring much peace; but, although we may know that such things are there, we can never imagine how they are in heaven, or how they blissfully operate upon one another, and therefore anything which we say in their regard approaches description little more than as a description to say a beautiful flower has petals or leaves. We know that our intellects will be filled with as clear a vision of God as things so finite can possess. We shall view the Divine Essence, and even understand the grand mysteries before which we now bow down humiliated. Faith will end in knowledge, and hope in enjoyment, and we shall "see as we are seen," while our hearts will burn with a love all beautiful coming from God, and transfusing our whole being as fire transfuses the red-hot bar. With this burning love and bright intellect will be united a thorough identity of will with the great Father, and all the grand virtues that grow out of love and knowledge; and we shall see God's effulgence revealed in us, and feel in us His beatitude, so that we shall love Him in ourselves and ourselves in Him. We shall "be inebriated with the abundance of God's house," and embraced as in an atmosphere of ineffable joy, because, as though entering a dwelling, the holy one "shall enter into the joy of his Lord." Passing beautiful are the thoughts which spring up when we hear those truths, but, oh! they flit by us undefined; we only know they are beautiful, but "we see as through a veil," and as "in a dark place." Let us pray and work, my soul, and, if need be, oh! let us suffer, that we may behold the "wondrous works" of our Father's beneficence unveiled and brightened in their nearness and communion on high amid the goods which ONE can give and no one on this earth may ever know. To behold the countless thousands, nay, millions, of beautiful bodies that will each "shine like the

sun ;" to behold them exempt from all pain and suffering for eternity, and odorous with the fragrance of immortal bloom ; to behold the *agility* which leaps like the lightning, and the *subtilty* that glides like a spirit ; the impassibility which renders them "like the angels of God," and to hear them amidst "the consolations according to the multitude of their pains, which have gladdened their souls ;" to hear them sing their "Alleluias" of triumph in the midst of the myriads of angels, who watched and guarded them, and prayed for them, many a long year ! Ah ! it is beautiful, again, to think of, anticipate, and pray for ! And, O my soul, remember it is for ever ! No change, no danger, no interruption, ever was, ever increasing in joy and love. "Rejoice in the things which have been spoken to thee." O my soul, "praise the Lord in His saints, praise Him in the firmament of His power !" And yet all we can think of is nothing compared with what God has there prepared for us, and what the blessed enjoy. Our poor souls are dazzled with the fancy and almost intoxicated with the hope. Yet, what images has the soul been able to present ? Images derived from man's experience or man's conception—nothing more. Transform all the pains which martyrs ever endured into joy as thrilling as their agony was excruciating, and add to them all the happiness that men ever possessed since Adam's eyes opened in Paradise—double, triple, quadruple—multiply them a million of times on, and what have you now ? You have man's experience and man's conceptions, and St. Paul tells us they are all vain : "Neither eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God has prepared for those who love Him."

THIRD POINT.

We may, perhaps, steal to a shadow of some good by forming to our minds some creature very kind, like St. Peter or St. John the Evangelist, or St. Philip or St. Vincent de Paul, and suppose him unselfish like them, and genial and affectionate ; and suppose him abounding in the resources of happiness and in the benevolence which dispenses them,

and watching every opportunity to bestow felicity on you. Suppose his conversation as full of wisdom as his mind is full of knowledge, and your heart burns within you as he speaks; and suppose the hours gliding by while you listen to the thoughts like what you would think of angels or of men filled with the Spirit of God. Well, then, multiply beings of beauty like that to millions, every one increasing your happiness, and still increasing it more every day. Place them and yourself in the midst of such scenes as only the imagination can supply—the green of fresh fields, the glow of sunlit waters, the atmosphere perfumed with odours, and the daylight lasting forever. No pain, no change, no sorrow, and, above all, no sin. Oh! how transcendently beautiful! How glorious and entrancing! Yet what is it all? The heart, the poor human heart, hath answered it, and “it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive” the heaven of God. Follow the disembodied soul—oh! follow her upwards, upwards by sun and system, and leave every bright constellation behind! On and on—beyond the empyrean itself—and on to the house which Jesus Christ hath won for us. “Raise your gates, O you Prince! raise the eternal gates, and the King of Glory will enter in!” “He will enter by His image, enter by His brother; His co-heir knocks to-day, and the charter of the right of Calvary is unbroken in His hand.” “Raise your gates!” Oh! the seraphims’ song! Oh! the cherubims’ praise! Oh! that grand and holy Host before me! “On!” cries the guardian angel, with the voice of victory. “On, further on!” and we meet the holy saints of ages, brighter than suns, and more beautiful than galaxies, and more numerous than the stars. “On, further on!” and we contemplate the starry host of patriarchs, prophets, and solitaries. “On, further on!” and we pass through the host of martyrs, apostles, virgins, holy monks, and hermits, and the rest. “On, still further on!” and the glorious seraphims and cherubims hail us as we advance. “On, further on!” and high above all heights, and near, and around, and within us all, the whole adore Him, bless Him, praise Him—THE ANCIENT OF DAYS—and Jesus, and dear Mother Mary, just at hand, to welcome her wayward, penitent, saved, glorified child.

EIGHTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.

On Sacred Clothing.

FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you hear your Angel Guardian addressing to you the word “Vigilate”—watch.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Ask grace to strip yourself generously of everything incompatible with the holy state you are about to embrace.

FIRST POINT.

Consider these words of St. Paul: “Strip yourself of the old man with his deeds, and put on the new, according to the image of Him who created you, as the elect of God, holy and beloved.” It is a maxim in a spiritual life that all the perfection of a Christian consists in stripping and clothing—that is to say, in emptying himself of self, and filling himself with God—namely, in stripping himself of the old man, and clothing himself with the new, which is Jesus Christ. This is what you should endeavour well to comprehend from your first entrance into religion. The change of dress you are going to make externally is to convince you of this important truth. To understand well this stripping yourself of the old man to clothe yourself with the new, reflect that Adam, having been created by God with the beautiful robe of innocence, and enriched with habits of infused and supernatural virtues, suffered himself to be miserably stripped of all his riches, by the malice of the devil, in consenting to evil; and, instead of virtue and sanctity, he found himself covered with the deformity of sin, with inclinations to vice, and with all irregular passions. Thus we, being the forlorn children of Adam, are born clothed with these sad liveries. Our understanding is darkened with the evils of ignorance and error, and our will is corrupted and surrounded by a thousand perverse inclinations to pride, sensuality, and such

like sinful dispositions. This is what St. Paul calls the "old man" and the "man of sin," of which you must strip yourself in quitting the dress of the world. "All that is in the world," saith St. John, "is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life." Enter into yourself and examine if you have any inclination still for the riches of this world, for sensual pleasures and gratifications, or for honours and the esteem of men. "Cast off these works of darkness, and put on the armour of light. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Now, this is effected in casting off the worldly dress and in putting on the holy Habit of Religion, to trample under foot the grandeur of the world and its triple concupiscences of honours, riches, and pleasures, with a full determination never to resume them any more.

SECOND POINT.

Consider the necessity of thus interiorly stripping yourself to become truly religious. Firstly, the sanctity of the holy cloister obliges you to it ; for, when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, He said, "Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." This shows you that God, who appears like a consuming fire to you in the midst of your austerities, is jealous for His honour, and requires that your feet be bare in approaching Him—that is, that your affections be stripped of terrestrial things. "The Lord thy God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." Secondly, the excellence of the holy state, to which your soul aspires on entering religion, requires, also, your putting off the weeds of the old man, and clothing yourself with "holiness and justice before Him all your days," for you have no other desire than to be the sacred spouse of Jesus Christ. Now, it was anciently commanded that if any one of the Israelites, the people of God, wished to marry a strange woman, taken captive in war, they should first "shave her hair and pare her nails, and put off the raiment wherein she was taken." This ordinance signifies nothing else but that the soul, whom Jesus Christ has purchased at the price of His Blood, and whom He wishes to take for

His spouse, should be first stripped of all that savours of the world and of the maxims of the house of her father, Adam ; so that neither in her thoughts, in her words, nor in her actions, should she retain anything that would make her appear a stranger in this new country and in this new state to which our Lord has raised her by an irresistible attraction of divine love. Renounce, then, with a generous heart, all the things of the world, obeying this voice of God : "Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear ; forget thy people and thy father's house, and the King shall greatly desire thy beauty." Beg earnestly this special grace of our Lord, and hearken to His sacred inspirations, withdrawing your affections from this sinful world and creatures, by the attraction of His love, that you may be henceforth enamoured with His divine beauty and with the loveliness of His house, a grace not given to thousands of Christians left in the world to struggle with more difficulty against its corrupt maxims. "All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given, he that can take, let him take it."

THIRD POINT.

Consider that it would avail little to have stripped yourself of the "old man" if you do not at the same time clothe yourself with the new ; wherefore the Apostle joined these two things together, as inseparable—it being impossible to strip ourselves of the inclinations of corrupt nature, which is the "old man," without clothing ourselves with Jesus Christ, or to clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ without stripping ourselves of the "old man." Consider, then, what it is to be clothed with Jesus Christ : it is to be adorned with His virtues, which are quite contrary to the vicious inclinations with which the sin of Adam had covered us. Renounce forever the triple concupiscence of sensual pleasures, of temporal riches, and of self-excellence, which, alas ! is too much rooted in our corrupt nature, and engenders this world of iniquity, before you can be invested with the sacred livery of Jesus Christ, who ardently wishes to choose you for His sacred spouse. To encourage and enable you to wean your heart from the world and its concupiscences, our Divine

Lover, the Lord Jesus, hath appeared among us, clothed with three other kinds of livery; for He hath chosen Poverty, trampling under foot all worldly riches—mortifications and sufferings instead of sensual pleasures, and perfect humility and contempt of honour instead of pride and vain-glory. These should, henceforth, be your livery; with these you should clothe yourself in taking the religious habit. Since God has graciously drawn you from the world and from the powers of darkness, to place you in religion, which is truly the kingdom of His beloved Son, you must be interiorly clothed like the citizens of this kingdom, and, like them, wear the livery of your King, Jesus Christ. “Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste, the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” Renounce Satan, with all his works and pomps, forsake the world and all its alluring baits and vanities, and destroy in you the concupiscence of the flesh, with its corrupt inclinations, in order that you may be in the proper disposition for clothing yourself with the virtues of your Divine Spouse, which are the foundation and substance of all Christian and religious perfection. Endeavour to be all covered and surrounded with them, as with a Habit, so that in all your actions it may be perceived the contempt you have for the riches, pleasures, and vain honours of this deluded world, which are, as the Wise Man saith, “Vanity of vanities and vexation of spirit.” Be assured that the Habit and Veil, that you will wear in the spirit of meekness and humility of heart, are preferable to the richest dress, and shall be changed in heaven into a clothing of glory and comfort; and that the solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience which you will make in religion for the love of Jesus Christ, and in obedience to your Rule, are treasures incomparably greater than all worldly vanities and sensual pleasures. Beseech our Lord to adorn your soul with all His virtues, and with strength to bear patiently the mortifications of a Conventual life, in order that you may be a good and fervent Novice, and one day merit to become the faithful spouse of your Divine Redeemer, Jesus Christ. To obtain this grace, implore the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, His Mother, and your Mother also, and humbly beg the assistance of the angels and saints.

EIGHTH DAY.

FIRST LECTURE.

On the Ceremony of To-morrow.

The moment you awake, let your first thoughts be those of gratitude to God that the happy day has at length arrived on which you are to have the honour of being clothed with the Holy Habit of Religion, and, of course, on which you are to begin a new life. Imagine that your Angel Guardian addresses you in these words of the Apostle: "It is now the hour for us to arise from sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than when we believed. The night is passed, and the day is at hand: let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light." Attend to the inspired words of the Prophet Baruch: "Put off, O Jerusalem, the garment of thy mourning and affliction, and put on the beauty and honour of that everlasting glory which thou hast from God. God will clothe thee with the double garment of justice, and will set a crown on thy head of everlasting glory, for God will show His brightness in thee." During the time of Mass and at Holy Communion, endeavour to perform spiritually what you intend doing afterwards effectually—that is, try to make this change of life, which is signified by the change of your dress. At the beginning of Mass, excite in your heart fervent acts of contrition for all the sins of your past life, and cleanse your soul from the least affection to sin. At the Epistle and Gospel renounce all the false maxims of the world—for example, that it is good to be rich, to enjoy pleasure and ease, to be honoured and esteemed. Instead of these sentiments embrace those of Jesus Christ: Blessed are the poor and those who are contemned and despised by the world. Animate yourself to a lively faith on those points. At the Offertory, and during the Canon, reflect on the bitter Passion of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and remark particularly the extreme annihilation to which He has reduced Himself on the cross, to show you that you ought to divest yourself of all things. Pray to Him earnestly, through the merits of His bitter

Passion and Death, to grant you this grace. Assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for this intention, and immolate yourself to the Eternal Father, willingly dying to all created things. At the time of Holy Communion, excite in your soul ardent desires to receive Jesus Christ with perfect purity of conscience, and with lively faith, firm confidence, and inflamed charity. On this solemn occasion your Divine Guest will impart to you a greater measure of grace, to enable you to make this happy passage from a worldly life to that of becoming His chaste spouse in Holy Religion. Follow faithfully the advice of St. Augustine, "Approach by your desires and affections of love, and with confidence; believe with firmness the truth of this Mystery of the Eucharist, and communicate, in order to be united to Jesus Christ, to be vivified by His Spirit, and to be entirely renewed." Receive your Blessed Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion with this intention, and after Communion make the usual acts of adoration and thanksgiving. Beg of Him to renew you entirely, saying with the Prophet Jeremias, "Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted: renew our days as from the beginning." Offer to Him your whole soul and all the senses of your body. Beseech Him to divest your understanding of the false maxims of the world, and to establish His own in their place, so that you may henceforward condemn what He condemns, and esteem what He esteems. Entreat Him to efface from your memory all earthly things, that in future you may think only on what may tend to His greater glory. Implore His divine help, that you may disengage your heart entirely from all affections to creatures, to be entirely attached and united to God alone; in order that you may live only for Him, and enjoy nothing but the possession of His grace. Renew your desire to please Him, and hope only for the goods He has promised you, for courage to undertake with fortitude whatever may tend to His glory, and for hatred and aversion to sin, the greatest of all evils. Beg of God that you may fear nothing but displeasing Him, and that all your desires, senses, and inclinations may be confined to the accomplishment of His divine will. Finally, restrain yourself by the spirit of mortification and modesty, so that your thoughts, words, and

actions may be interiorly and exteriorly clothed with Jesus Christ, by a perfect imitation of His divine virtues. For the remainder of the time until the ceremony, endeavour to keep your mind recollected by frequent aspirations. The following advice taken from St. Paul will be proper for the occasion: "Strip yourself of the old man, with his deeds, and put on the new, who, according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth." Grant, O Lord, that in taking off the worldly dress I may quit also whatever may be "conformable to this world;" and that in putting on the Religious Habit I may be "reformed in the newness of mind, and may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God." It is advisable to have before the ceremony half-an-hour for recollection, that you may indulge the fervent affections of your heart on this important occasion, and renew the offering of yourself wholly, without any reserve, to your Blessed Redeemer, who wishes to become your Divine Spouse. Recommend yourself particularly to the Blessed Virgin, and put yourself under her special protection, earnestly begging of her, that as she clothed the Eternal Word with our flesh, so she may obtain for you the happiness of being clothed with His Holy Spirit. You will also recommend yourself affectionately to your good Angel Guardian and holy Patrons, who are interested in the great action you are about to perform. Beg of them to obtain for you the true spirit of the religious state you are going to embrace. When the bell rings for the ceremony, think your Angel Guardian addresses you with these words of the Prophet: "Arise, arise; put on thy strength, O Sion; put on the garments of thy glory." Obeying this voice of God, elevate your thoughts and affections towards heaven, withdrawing them from all earthly things; animate again your courage to renounce the world and all that belongs to it, and your generosity to consecrate yourself without reserve to Jesus Christ. When the hymn, *O Gloriosa*, is begun, pray to the ever Blessed Virgin Mary to admit you into her company, that you may be of the number of those pure virgins "who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." When you have received the Blessed Candle, think you are destined to be of the happy number of the holy virgins

admitted to the nuptials of Jesus Christ, and that this is the reason you receive the lighted taper. It also signifies the fervor of charity which you should always maintain whilst awaiting the heavenly Spouse of your soul, that you may not be excluded from the nuptials, like the "foolish virgins" mentioned in the Gospel. While your worldly garments are being taken off, ardently wish to be stripped of the manners, affections, and inclinations of the world, and of the imperfections of your frail nature, which are not conformable to the spirit of Jesus Christ. When you are clothed with the Holy Habit of Religion, beg of our Lord Jesus Christ to clothe you interiorly with the spirit of mortification and penance, signified by the humble vesture of the Religious Habit, which is an effectual means to recover the robe of innocence, and to be clothed with the new man, Jesus Christ. When the Cincture is put on you, pray that your will and desires may be, for the future, subject to obedience, and that you may follow in all things the will of your Superiors. Receive the Veil with profound humility, making a fervent act of thanksgiving; accept it as a mark of that purity and innocence in which Jesus Christ is going to re-establish you by your embracing the religious life; beg of Him the grace of final perseverance in these sentiments. When the Cloak of the Church is given you, think that it represents the nuptial robe of charity with which you ought to be clothed, in order to deserve to be admitted to the Marriage Feast, and to receive from Jesus Christ Himself the robe of immortality. During the Prayer, beg of God to complete in you the great work He has begun, by bestowing on you all the virtues which this clothing represents. The *Regnum Mundi*, or these words, "the kingdom of the world, and all secular ornaments, I despise, for the love of my Lord Jesus Christ," are a public declaration of your renunciation of the world. The *Elegi abjecta esse*, or "I have chosen to be an object in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners," shows the sentiments you ought to have in embracing the religious state; that is, you should be penetrated with the deepest sentiments of humility and self-annihilation, which is the foundation of evangelical perfection. Say it, then, with such fervor and earnestness,

that you may accomplish your resolution. During the hymn, *Veni Creator*, you will be prostrated, and beg of the Lord that you may die to yourself and to all created objects, in order that He may fill you with His Divine Spirit, that so you may begin a new life in all things conformable to His. When you go to salute the Mothers and Sisters, do so with holy joy to see yourself associated with the sacred spouses of Jesus Christ; and humbly petition your Divine Saviour, through His mercy, to enlighten you and to conduct you in the paths of virtue, that you may be united to Him for all eternity. Amen.



MEDITATION

FOR

THE MORNING OF RECEPTION.



ON THE PRESENTATION OF OUR BLESSED LADY IN THE TEMPLE.



FIRST PRELUDE.—Imagine you see our Blessed Lady ascending the steps of the Temple.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Ask our Blessed Mother to give you a share in those virtues which animated her most pure heart on this occasion.

FIRST POINT.

Whilst yet of tender age, Mary heard the voice of the Lord, inviting her to take up her abode in His holy habitation: “Attend, daughter, and see, and incline thy ear, and forget thy people and thy father’s house.” Not the world was the place designed for this spotless dove, and hence God promised that she should be brought to a place of security, a place appropriate for those souls who yearn after Him. Oh! how meet it was, that in that Temple should be reared up and protected that tender infant, who was herself destined to be one day the all-beautiful Temple of the Most High! Her parents carried her thither, and many of the holy fathers give it as their opinion that she was then but three years old. She remained in the Temple until she reached her fourteenth year. “When she was three years of age, she was brought by her parents to the Temple, and continued in it till her fourteenth year,” says St. Bonaventure. What must that

heavenly child have felt when she saw the providence of God which drew her so early from the turmoils of the world, and placed her in the still solitude of the Temple! With her great soul filled with exultation, well may she have cried out, "My spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour." And well may she, with David, have burst forth into the exclamation, "I rejoice in the things that were said to me; we shall go into the house of the Lord." And when she arrived at the gates of the Temple, how tenderly she kissed them, at the same time adoring and praising the Divine Majesty for having conferred on her so priceless a boon. No doubt, her heart felt the pang of separation from her parents, whom she loved so dearly; but what is there which that soul would not have renounced in order to please God, whom she thoroughly loved? For it must be borne in mind that this holy child's age was no measure of her knowledge—far from it, indeed. St. Bernard, speaking of Mary, assures us, that "at the first moment of her life that child had knowledge and love, as had Adam in the earthly Paradise, and as had the angels of heaven." How highly, then, must she have esteemed her vocation to the Temple! What actions of thanksgiving she must have offered to the Lord! Happy those souls whom God calls to serve Him in His house. "Blessed are they who dwell in Thy house, O Lord." They have the most beautiful pledge of the divine predilection. The spiritual state is for them a city of peace and of pure joys; and, if they are faithful to God, they pass from the haven of this life over to the haven of a happy eternity. Oh! how many exclaim, "Every good thing came to me with my religious vocation."

SECOND POINT.

Mary's first act in the Temple was a perfect and irrevocable yielding of herself into the hands of God: "She offered and consecrated herself to the perpetual service of God." Her soul, with its powers; her body, with its senses; her privileges, her gifts, all that she was and all that she had—the whole, and the whole without reserve, she consecrated to God. She considered herself in all things as His spouse;

she gave herself wholly up to Him, that He might dispose of her according to His good pleasure; in short, she thought of living only, entirely for Him, and of dying for Him: "To Him do I wholly live, to Him do I wholly die." This consecration kept her in constant union with her Lord, for to Him she referred all her thoughts, words, feelings, and actions; and He, on His part, attracted her sweetly, giving her incessantly new lights and new graces. St. Ambrose says that this most intimate union was not broken by sleep, because she could truthfully say that her heart watched and loved even in her sleep. What can he not promise himself, by reason of his generosity, who gives himself up to the Lord perfectly and in downright earnest! And when a higher light revealed to her in the sacred pages the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, oh! how the ardour of her desires was then inflamed! Accordingly, as she contemplated the Unspeakable Mystery, she felt in her bosom an increase of love for Him—she yearned after the delights of seeing with her own eyes the woman who was destined to be His Mother; she coveted to become the servant of that Mother; with most earnest entreaties she called upon that time to come quickly: "Let the earth open up, and bud forth the Saviour." Who knows how often from the lips of Mary those words had ascended to God as so many ejaculations of love? Who knows how often God assured her by interior light that the time had already arrived when the Mother of the Saviour was in the world? Already had He done great things to Mary, and he was now preparing her for the profound mystery; and yet, in the midst of so many heavenly illuminations, Mary considered herself unworthy to be a maid-servant to the Mother of God. For one thing only was she solicitous—to offer herself to Him constantly and in the wholeness of her heart, humbly hoping that He might choose to accept at her hands any, even the very lowest of services. Oh! what weighty lessons for us in those facts! Mary's consecration of herself was complete and perfect—can so much be said of thine? In a passing moment of zeal, it is easy for one to flatter himself that he has offered himself as a perfect holocaust to God; but should He put us to the test, requiring us to tear ourselves away from cer-

tain persons, certain situations, and certain places; should He deprive us of health, and let humiliations loose upon us, in each of the trials mentioned we should soon evidence that our offering was neither complete nor perfect. Were we thus tested, how many objections would arise in our hearts? Then endeavour now to offer thyself to Him without reserve; say to Him He may dispose of thee as He pleases; and since all things are His, let Him send thee prosperity or adversity, consolation or affliction—His assistance will enable thee to be satisfied. Oh! how precious in the sight of God would be such an oblation, and how highly prized it would be by the most holy Virgin!

THIRD POINT.

That tender child immediately put her hand to the work of conforming in the most perfect manner to all the regulations of the Temple. In it was certainly to be found what is to be met with in houses in which are placed young persons to receive their training and education. In the Temple were superiors whom it was necessary to obey, rules which it was necessary to comply with, and duties which it was necessary to fulfil. How assiduously and punctiliously must she not have performed the prescribed exercises; with what eager submission must she not have obeyed the slightest intimation? St. Bonaventure says that, with conscientiousness almost tainted with scrupulosity, Mary executed in the Temple all the orders of the High Priest, and that she daily prayed to God to the end that He might give her this spirit of obedience. St. Jerome relates that "Mary was assiduous at prayer and study, the first to assist at the vigils, the best versed in the knowledge of the law; in humility the most advanced; in the singing of the psalms of David the most delightful to be heard; in purity the most pure, and in every virtue the most perfect." What a loving and edifying spectacle was it not to behold this tender maiden, whom the angels emulously waited upon, setting an example of promptness to her companions in performing the common duties and anticipating the wishes of those who held the place of God in her regard! How edifying to wit-

ness the cheerfulness with which she busied herself with the most lowly household work ; how she was unto all a perfect model of humility and obedience ! Happy the soul who understands that God cannot be better served than by obeying those who hold His place : “ He who heareth you heareth Me.” Thus did she increase in wisdom and age and grace with God and men. Accordingly, as she advanced in years, she increased in knowledge of heavenly things, and in perfection before God and men. As the sun from the moment of his rising till midday becomes clearer and clearer, and constantly sheds brighter rays on the universe, even so, was Mary never lukewarm in her submission to God ? No ; she offered her sacrifice with constantly-increasing zeal. Many devote themselves to God, but afterwards, instead of advancing in fidelity and love, they become so callous that God can apply to them the words formerly addressed to the Bishop of Sardinia : “ I know thy works : that thou art neither cold nor hot.” Ask your Blessed Mother to teach you how to serve your good God with a generous and zealous heart, and ask her to be herself your Guide, Model, and Teacher during your Novitiate.



LECTURE

FOR

THE DAY OF RECEPTION.



What the Apostle St Paul recommended to the first faithful he recommends to us all: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Now, in a spiritual sense, to put on our Lord Jesus Christ is to fill our minds and hearts with the maxims of Jesus Christ, and to regulate our conduct by this Divine Model. But, taking the words of this great Apostle more to the letter, we may well apply them to the Religious Habit, or, to say more properly, to the person called to religion, and admitted to this holy state by the sacred ceremony of receiving the Habit, Cincture, and Veil, for she there clothes herself with Jesus Christ, in effect. She clothes herself with the poverty and humility of Jesus Christ, since the Religious Habit is a poor, humble Habit; she clothes herself with the chastity and mortification of Jesus Christ, since it is a modest and penitential Habit; and she clothes herself with the obedience and holiness of Jesus Christ, since the Habit is an emblem of these virtues, and bespeaks submission and sanctity. But let us enter into some detail, and see more in particular what is the mystery of the holy Habit that you wear in quality of religious; let us examine what are the engagements and what the advantages of it: then we shall remark how it instructs you in your obligations, how it condemns your sloth, in what manner it honours you, and how you may honour or dishonour it, according to the spirit that animates you and to the edification or disedification you give exteriorly. From all this you may draw very salutary lessons and powerful motives to awaken your fervor in the discharge of your

sacred duties. What is the Religious Habit? It is, if we may use the expression, a kind of sacrament—I mean to say, it is a visible sign of the interior dispositions and invisible sentiments of the religious soul. A religious, touched by God’s grace, and feeling within her the efficacy of this expression of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of St. Luke : “Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God,” does not content herself with being “poor in spirit,” mentioned by St. Matthew, but attends also to the letter, by absolutely stripping herself of all things to imitate the real poverty of Jesus Christ. It is to make open profession of this evangelical poverty that she clothes herself with a poor Habit, in order to show that all the riches of this world are nothing to her ; that she has entirely renounced them, and that she aspires to the immortal riches which are reserved for her in heaven. The religious who is a disciple of a God-Man, humbled for us, knowing the vanity and nothingness of all human pride and greatness, clothes herself with a modest and humble Habit, in order to testify how great an enemy she is to all that is called the pomp and pride of the world ; how much she despises them ; and that, instead of seeking to appear and distinguish herself by a false show, all her ambition is to tend incessantly towards “the possession of the ‘eternal’ kingdom of God” prepared for her from the foundation of the world ; “to sit” forever “with Jesus on a throne in heaven ;” “to receive a kingdom of glory and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord ;” to be clothed with “a wedding garment ;” to be “in shining apparel before the throne of God ;” and “to shine” forever “in the brightness of the saints, as the brightness of the firmament,” and as “stars for all eternity.” Yea, more, for our Blessed Redeemer saith : “The just shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” These, indeed, are real honours and dignities, riches, and pleasures, which the truly religious soul should “hunger and thirst after,” should “labour for ;” but she should loathe and condemn a “corruptible crown, a meat that perisheth, vanity and lying things,” which “deserve to be despised.” She should be “like unto a man who found a treasure in a field : for joy thereof he goeth and selleth all that he had and buyeth that

field ;" and also "like unto a merchant who, having found a pearl of great price, sold all that he had and bought it." It is thus the good religious renounces, like Jesus, "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," and, like St. Paul, "counts all things as loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ," who is her only treasure, her Lover by excellence, and her dear and intimate friend. "My beloved to me and I to Him." "I to my beloved and my beloved to me, who feedeth among the lilies." To signify this excellent choice, the religious, at her Reception, willingly and joyfully clothes herself with a coarse and penitential Habit, as if she said: Let worldlings, who are idolaters of their flesh, flatter and nourish it in a criminal effeminacy; as for me, I will "take up the yoke of Jesus Christ upon me," and I will "learn of Him, because He is meek and humble of heart," that I may "find refreshment and rest in my soul," for His "yoke is sweet and His burden light." For Jesus' sake, and to fulfil His divine precept, "I will deny myself, and take up my cross daily, and follow Him," bearing His weightier cross to Calvary. I will always bear about in my body the mortification of Jesus, that the life, also, of Jesus may be "made manifest in my body." In fine, "I will glory in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world, for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body." To the Religious Habit is added the Sacred Veil, which Tertullian compares to a buckler, to serve as a "defence to the soul" against all scandals to which the religious is exposed. By it she is armed against all the assaults of temptations that she might have to undergo. But, setting apart this sentiment, let us consider what is certain. The religious, in covering herself with a veil, declares that she is a Christian virgin, and makes an authentic, formal, and solemn avowal of the resolution she has already taken of henceforth shutting her eyes to all terrestrial and profane objects, and of destroying in herself the two most ordinary but most pernicious desires, which are the desire of seeing and being seen. By the veil, she buries, as it were, her countenance alive, and hides it in the obscurity of holy retreat, to be no longer an instrument of curiosity, or to be gazed on by the world, that she may more

freely occupy herself only with the care of pleasing our Lord Jesus Christ, and of gaining His divine affections, "who is to become her Spouse, her Portion, and her Inheritance." By the veil she hides her countenance from the creature and terrene objects, that she may regard only her Creator and Redeemer, to whom she should consecrate all the affections of her heart and desires of her soul, that she may fondly say: "I found Him whom my soul loveth; I held Him, and will not let Him go till I bring Him into my house." The only true happiness of a religious soul is secured by a holy and strict enclosure, and a perfect separation from kindred and acquaintances; a seclusion from unnecessary visits, and a disengagement of the heart and mind from all temporal concerns, in order to be wholly and solely devoted to an intimate communication with God alone by the perfect fulfilment of His most adorable Will, clearly manifested by her Rules and by the voice of superior authority. Then the truly religious shall "judge not to know anything but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Then she "shall glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to her and she to the world." Then she shall be practically instructed in this divine science: "Deny thyself, and take up thy Cross daily, and follow Me." Then, in fine, she shall embrace the crucifix with most tender devotion, and shall enter into the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Furnace of Divine Love, and exclaim with the Royal Prophet: "In peace, in the selfsame, I will sleep and I will take my rest." The young Novice binds herself to all these duties and virtues by receiving the sacred Veil. The Cincture, or sacred girdle, which adjusts the Habit, is an emblem of that chastity, mortification, and penance which are the spirit of a religious life, and the safeguard of true sanctity. This Cincture is continually worn as a monitor to preserve the lily of perpetual chastity, according to these words of the Canticles: "As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters." Jesus Christ gave this eulogy to His sainted Precursor: "There hath not risen among them, that are born of women, a greater than John the Baptist." Yet to preserve his innocence and sanctity spotless, he wore a penitential Habit girt round with a

Cincture. In wearing the sacred Cincture let it frequently remind you and encourage you to lead a mortified and penitential life, "always bearing in your body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in your body." Behold this sensible view of the Habit, Veil, and Cincture ! Behold what they signify and what they announce to you ! Whence proceed the respect that persons in the world have towards religious clothed with this attire, and which is regarded with honour and distinction. If clothes in general are put on for use and convenience, there are also particular robes which mark distinction, respect, and dignity. Thus kings and queens wear in great assemblies the royal mantle, or outward dress, as a symbol and character of the majesty of their persons. The Sovereign Pontiff and Prelates of the Church, clothed in their Pontificals, are distinguished from the inferior clergy, and the clergy in sacred vestments at the altar are honored above the laity. "The blessed in heaven," according to the Scripture expression, "are clothed in white robes," proportioned to the degrees of their beatitude and sanctity. "The angels," who were seen at the Sepulchre and after the Ascension of Jesus, "were clothed with white robes, and their raiment as snow, &c." Now, such is by comparison the Religious Habit, Veil, and Cincture, which denote the purity of the soul, and are of great ornament and value. This ornament and this value do not consist in the materials of which the Habit, Veil, and Cincture are composed, but in the ministry to which they are attached, in the conditions, in the elevation, and in the rank and pre-eminence which they represent. Whence comes it, then, that the Habit of religion, with all its simplicity and poverty, is nevertheless so respectable and honorable ? It can only be because the religious clothing represents those who are honored with it as the friends of God, persons especially engaged and consecrated to God, servants and familiars of the Most High, spouses of Jesus Christ, virgins who follow the Lamb, the poor in spirit, entitled to a heavenly reward, the faithful imitators of their divine Spouse, whose livery they have taken, and to whom alone they glory to belong. These are, in effect, the first

ideas the devout laity form of religious persons, judging them by their sacred clothing to be holy and honorable, and worthy of respect and veneration. If good Christians who are in grace and favour with God are worthy of high honor and respect, how much more honorable and worthy to be revered are the consecrated Spouses of Jesus Christ, secluded from the world, clothed in the religious dress, and devoted in a special manner to the immediate service of the great Monarch of Heaven and Earth, "the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." To correspond with this exalted dignity and respect on earth, and to be elevated to superior honor and glory, inconceivable and inexpressible to human mind and tongue, you will be scrupulously faithful in the discharge of *all* your religious duties, perfectly obedient to your rules and to the admonitions and instructions of your Mother, the Mistress of Novices. Let us proceed further and interrogate the religious : What should she learn from the respect, reverence, holy opinion and honor rendered to her by good Catholics and the Christian people in the world? what conclusion should she draw from it? what reflection should she make on herself? what has she to reproach herself for? and, finally, for what should she be confounded? It was the practice of St. Bernard to set continually before his eyes the duties of his profession, and to interrogate himself, saying : "Bernard, Bernard, why hast thou come hither?" This he often repeated to renew his fervor, and to guard against any tepidity or lukewarmness in his religious duties. Solid reflection and useful remembrance, that should never be effaced from the mind of a religious. After the example of St. Bernard, and even with more reason than this saint, the religious should often interrogate herself and ask : Why have I entered this hallowed enclosure? Why have I quitted relatives, friends, and the world? What is the purpose of my wearing this religious Habit? What does the sacred Veil signify? What the Cincture? What difference should exist between a Christian in the world and me who am called into holy religion? To what have I pretended, or what should I have proposed to myself in receiving the holy Habit of religion? This Habit is poor, by which I profess publicly

the poverty of Jesus Christ ; it is modest and humble, by which I profess publicly the perfect purity and humility of Jesus Christ ; it is coarse and penitential, by which I profess the cross and mortification of Jesus Christ. This Habit shall, therefore, preserve in me the spirit of poverty and disinterestedness, the spirit of humility and meekness, the spirit of mortification and self-denial, and the spirit of purity and sanctity. The sacred Veil I wear consecrates me to the solitude and silence of a retired life, and conceals me from the eyes of the world : it teaches me disengagement from terrene and exterior things, in order to become more recollected and spiritual, and to have that interior communication with God so conformable to my religious vocation. This Veil of religion is an emblem of divine faith, which was first given to me at my baptism, and is now replaced on my head and arms, to serve both as a shield of protection and a helmet of salvation. "The shield of faith" will have that particular efficacy "to extinguish all the fiery darts levelled at you by the wicked one," the devil ; "the helmet" of hope and of entire confidence in Jesus Christ, my divine Spouse, will protect me from being wounded by presumption on my own weakness and infirmity, or by diffidence of divine grace to assist me ; for I shall place my entire confidence in Jesus Christ, who saith to St. Paul : "My grace is sufficient for thee, &c." The sacred Girdle or Cincture reminds me of the duty of penance and chastisement of the body to bring it into subjection lest I should "become a castaway ;" it also reminds me of that purity and chastity of soul and body which form the chief ornament of virgins consecrated to God, and espoused to Jesus Christ. In imitation of St. John the Baptist I shall willingly gird myself with this sacred Cincture, that I may be also preserved pure and unstained, as becoming a chaste Spouse of Jesus Christ, to which eminent dignity I hope to aspire at my solemn profession, and for which I will prepare during my probation with the utmost diligence and fervor. Besides the Habit, Cincture, and Veil, which the religious receives with holy joy, she holds at the sacred ceremony of her Reception a lighted candle, as an emblem of her desire to be of the number of those "wise virgins who arose and

trimmed their lamps with oil to meet the Bridegroom, that when He came they were ready." Labour to practice these and other virtues, which your sacred clothing represents and reminds you of. Let your sacred clothing perfectly agree with the interior affections and dispositions of your soul, and with your whole conduct, "in holiness and justice before God all your days." Endeavour to support the sanctity of your religious clothing, and to honor it in such a manner, by an entire fidelity and an exact regularity, that it may be for you a nuptial robe, with which you will be received to the feet of your Divine Spouse, Jesus Christ, in eternal bliss, and will enjoy His company with all those glorious "virgins who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."



INSTRUCTION

ON

ENTRANCE INTO NOVITIATE

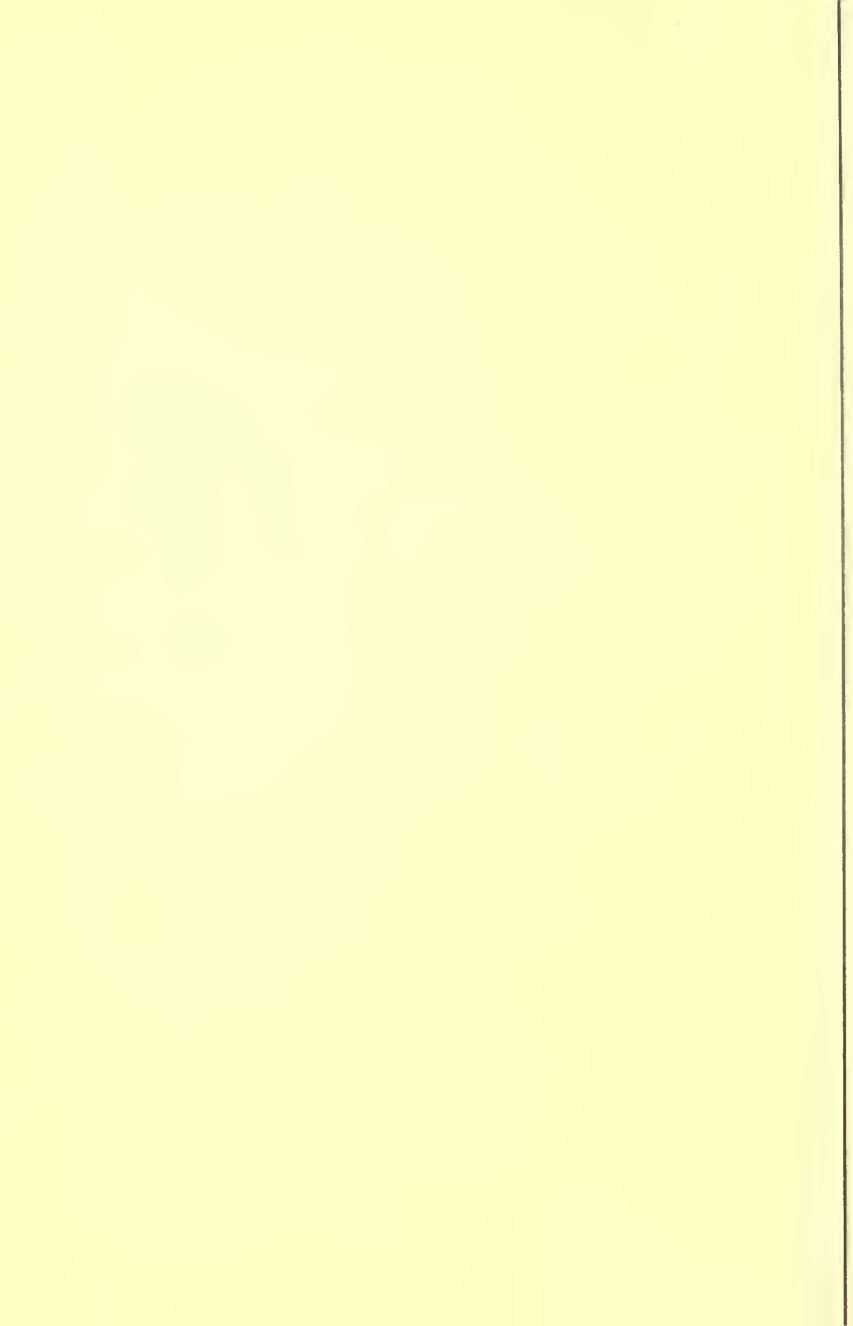
AFTER RECEPTION.

You are now become a Novice in religion. The change of dress you have just made is for you, as it were, a new birth, and a happy return to the innocence of your baptism, so that "you are in Christ a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, all things are made new." If, then, the entrance into religion is a spiritual birth, the time of novitiate is the time of infancy, by which Novices who wish to attain the perfect age of Jesus Christ must commence. It is a decree, pronounced by our Blessed Redeemer, that, "unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of God." The first thing, therefore, in which you should imitate little children is to desire milk. This milk, which you should desire with so much ardor, is no other than the spiritual nourishment which is drawn from meditations, pious lectures, and the Holy Sacraments. It is for this you should hunger and thirst if you desire to strengthen yourself in virtue, and to advance in the way of perfection, otherwise you will soon become languishing. Let it be, then, your principal care to perform, with diligence and with fruit, your spiritual duties. Be confident that you will draw divine milk from this fruitful source, and that Almighty God will be, during your Noviceship, your Guardian and fond Parent, as He had promised by the Prophet Isaias: "You shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall caress you, as one whom the mother caresseth, so I will comfort you; and you shall be

comforted." In this happy state of infancy desire to be nourished with this divine milk, and earnestly petition the Lord to give it to you in abundance, in order that you may grow up and become strong in grace for His service and greater glory. Renounce the deceitful attractions of the world and its poisonous weeds—that is to say, temporal pleasures, riches and honours, of which worldlings are so desirous, and which only prove to them a deadly poison—but thirst after this celestial milk of the knowledge and love of eternal truths, which will procure for you every grace and blessing. Another great object to be attended to and acquired, in order to make a good novitiate, is humility, of which little children are emblematic. "Jesus, calling unto Him a little child, set him in the midst, and said: Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven." You must, then, become as a child by humility towards God and men. Be humble before God, by keeping yourself in His presence as a child, whose infirmity and weakness are extreme, and who continually requires the assistance of others, because, in effect, you cannot advance one step in virtue if He do not support you. You will easily fall into sin, but cannot rise from it, unless God extends to you His Hand. You will, spiritually, die of hunger, if God, like a good parent, do not continually give you the nourishment of His grace; and you will be stripped of all the ornaments of virtue, if He do not Himself clothe you with them. To have recourse even to our Blessed Redeemer, it requires the attendance of divine grace. Add to this your inability to think of anything good, or to pray for what is necessary for your salvation, without the preventing grace of God. Now, as we can neither do, nor speak, nor think, nor pray for what regards our sanctification and salvation without heavenly inspiration and the pure goodness of "Almighty God, from whom every best gift and every perfect gift cometh down," we should humbly acknowledge our own insufficiency, and continually implore the divine aid, and calling upon God with the Psalmist: "O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me." Distrust, therefore, entirely your own weakness and insufficiency, and cast yourself with full confidence into

the arms of your amiable and compassionate Father, as a little child into the arms of its mother, and you will assuredly find in the bosom of your Divine Parent all that is necessary for your religious perfection. It is not sufficient to be humble, like a child, by sentiments of profound annihilation of yourself before the majesty of your great God, but you must practice humility also before creatures, particularly before your religious companions. "The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God," saith the Wise Man. Regard yourself as the meanest and most contemptible of all, and undeserving of any favour or respect. Seek not to appear, nor to be esteemed, but suffer with patience all the trials and crosses you meet with from others, without manifesting the least resentment. This is the happy state of spiritual infancy to which the kingdom of God is promised. To become a good Novice in holy religion, you should imitate, also, those other good qualities of children—simplicity, docility, and submission. A child does simply what its mother desires it, without reasonings or reflections; it lets itself be carried or conducted without inquiring where; it has but one thought, which is to keep near its mother. Do you act in a similar manner towards God and those who govern you in His name. This is an excellent disposition with which to commence your religious life and to arrive at the most sublime perfection. Labor, then, from the beginning in the abnegation of your own judgment, and submit with simplicity to the advices which will be given you to lead you to perfection, letting yourself be conducted as a child. Firmly believe that you will never succeed better or more securely than in following the direction of those to whom God has committed you, and in conforming to the spirit of your holy rules. You must persuade yourself that, whatever talent or capacity you imagine you possess, you are still ignorant of many things relative to your salvation and to the perfection of a religious life, and that you are in these matters like a newly-born babe. Confirm yourself in this opinion, which is most certain, and act accordingly. Oh! how happy will you be if you follow this practice. Acting thus, you will merit that God should take particular care of you, as His

child, and that He should carry you in His arms, lest you feel the fatigue of the journey to perfection. Pray to our Lord Jesus Christ, who became a child for the love of you, though He is the Wisdom and the Word of His Eternal Father, to destroy in you the spirit of pride and its evil offspring—deceit, indocility, anger, and such like—and to establish within you profound humility, simplicity, and meekness, which will restore to you the innocence of little children. To this effect repeat frequently the prayer of St. Augustine: “O Lord Jesus, take from me the spirit of pride, and give me the treasure of Thy humility.” You will also address a similar petition to your holy Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, in or like this form: “O Mary, Virgin of Virgins! thou wast the most humble and yet the most exalted above all creatures.” Earnestly petition your Blessed Redeemer that, with humility, He may grant you also the true spirit of meekness, holy simplicity, and perfect submission, which are the natural ornaments of infancy and innocence, and should be the characteristics of holy virgins, the true followers of the Lamb of God. Have recourse often to our Blessed Lady, the Virgin of Virgins, that she may intercede for you during your novitiate to acquire these amiable virtues, more precious than all worldly treasures. Remember that she is really your Mother, bequeathed to you as such by her Divine Son while expiring on the cross for your salvation and sanctification. Implore her powerful assistance, especially during the time of your spiritual infancy of novitiate, that you may, in due time, be prepared for your solemn profession, and for the great sacrifice and holocaust of your entire self by your future religious vows. Beg of St. Joseph, the chaste spouse of the ever-blessed Virgin, to be your chief patron, good father, and master and faithful director during your holy novitiate, and to prepare you well for your future solemn profession. Have recourse to your angel guardian, your patron saint, and all the holy patrons and saints of your Order.





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